



# PROJECT REPORT

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December 2006

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# Contents

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1	Foreword	2
2	Introduction	3
3	Background	5
4	Executive Summary	6
5	Project Objectives	7
6	The Approach Adopted	8
7	Key Messages	11
8	Common Themes and Issues	12
9	Project Activity: The Interventions	13
10	Taking the Work Forward	47
12	Annexe: List of Partners	48

Preparing learners for employment and helping those in work to develop their careers are central to the work of Scotland's Colleges. As our learners have changed over time and as the demands of the world of work have altered and intensified, the challenges associated with this work have also changed. In recent years the importance of the 'softer' skills required by the job market has been recognised more widely. Developing these skills is a priority for the college sector and it is the challenges associated with this that led to the Focus on Learning 2 (FoL2) action research initiative being launched in early 2005.



*Dr Craig Thomson*

FoL2 built on the success of the first Focus on Learning project. This had demonstrated the benefits of a collaborative, action research approach being used to address a significant aspect of the learning experience of college students. In FoL2, the focus has been on developing and testing new ways of embedding employability skills in the curriculum.

The interventions briefly described in this report covered a range of employability skills, client groups and vocational areas. They are intriguing in their diversity. However, the work has shared a common objective: to improve learners' chances of gaining ... and sustaining ... appropriate employment. The case studies which are also part of this report offer compelling testament to the importance and the impact of the work.

Six of Scotland's Colleges, supported by SFEU, developed and delivered a total of 22 'interventions'. These embraced the principle that enhancing employability is not a discrete activity to be undertaken in isolation of the rest of the learning experience, but should be embedded in effective learning and teaching. The project was supported by a grant from the Scottish Funding Council's Strategic Development Fund.

All of those involved in the partnership are to be congratulated. Experienced and novice action researchers worked very effectively, both individually and collectively. The co-operation of employers was exceptional. Together, the colleges and employers addressed important issues and met demanding project deadlines.

Effective, appropriate employability skills are critical to success in the workplace. For the learner, improved 'softer' skills means improved life chances in their personal and social lives as well as in the world of work.

I would like to thank everyone involved in Focus on Learning 2. The success of the project has been such that follow-on activity is taking place in all the partner colleges and the participants are looking forward to sharing the lessons they have learned with colleagues in the college sector and beyond.

**Dr Craig Thomson**  
**Chair**

Focus on Learning 2: Steps to Employment Steering Group  
December 2006

This report presents the main outcomes of Focus on Learning 2: Steps to Employment, an action research project supported by the Scottish Funding Council's Strategic Development Fund. This project addressed the significant challenge of helping learners, across a range of ages, levels and vocational areas, to develop the employability skills that would enable them to gain and sustain appropriate employment and to progress their careers.

The first Focus on Learning project, which focused on learning processes, demonstrated the benefits of a collaborative, partnership approach and an action research methodology in developing the skills of learners and staff alike. Focus on Learning 2 has built on this model in developing new ways of enhancing employability skills.

Six of Scotland's Colleges were involved in the FoL2 partnership. They developed and piloted a total of 22 'interventions' covering a range of vocational areas. Several key assumptions underpinned project activity from the outset.

#### These were:

- that the employability skills to be addressed should *exclude* the technical skills needed to do a particular job but should *include* the core and soft skills required in the modern workplace;
- that employability skills needs will vary between learners and between vocational areas;
- that employability skills are most effectively delivered when they are embedded in learning and teaching activity, rather than delivered discretely as a 'bolt-on' to the curriculum;
- that enhancing the employability skills of learners will impact positively on their motivation and achievement.

#### Key questions considered by Focus on Learning 2 included:

- What do colleges mean by 'employability skills' in terms of criteria which influence the success of college learners in finding and keeping work?
- How can colleges reconfigure the ways in which learning is presented to embed the development of these skills more effectively in the curriculum?
- What are the underlying issues that affect success in developing learners' employability skills?

FoL2 was an ambitious project involving a complex set of challenges. Previous work on employability had to be assessed. A wide range of activity had to be managed and coordinated. Progress had to be judged and communicated.

#### The project had four phases

1. Review of relevant literature and development of interventions.
2. Delivery of interventions.
3. Evaluation and write-up of findings.
4. Dissemination of findings.

This report is the culmination of intervention activity and summarises what the action researchers did and what they have learned. The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

#### Background

A summary of how and why the project came about: the policy drivers and reports of skill gaps that pointed to a need for new ways of embedding employability skills to be tested.

#### Executive Summary

A synopsis of the context, objectives, methods and findings of Focus on Learning 2: Steps to Employment.

Continued overleaf

# Introduction

## Project Objectives

This section of the report lists the key objectives of the project along with the intended outputs.

## The Approach Adopted

The organisation and monitoring of 22 action research interventions in six colleges presented particular challenges. This section describes the activity that took place during the four phases of the project and how it was managed.

## Key Messages

This section of the report outlines the key findings of Focus on Learning 2: Steps to Employment in terms of what lessons were learned in individual interventions and what we learned together in the partnership. While individual elements of good practice are listed, successful development of employability skills lies in consideration of all these components in a multi-pronged approach.

## Common Themes and Issues

A major strength of the project was that it gave partners many opportunities not only to share particular successes and failures, but also to consider some of the overarching issues affecting the delivery of employability skills in Scotland's Colleges. These are listed as ten guiding principles for employability activity.

## Project Activities: The Interventions

This section gives the background to each of the 22 interventions, the nature of the action research activity and the key findings. Further information about any of the individual interventions can be obtained from the named contacts.

## Taking the Work Forward

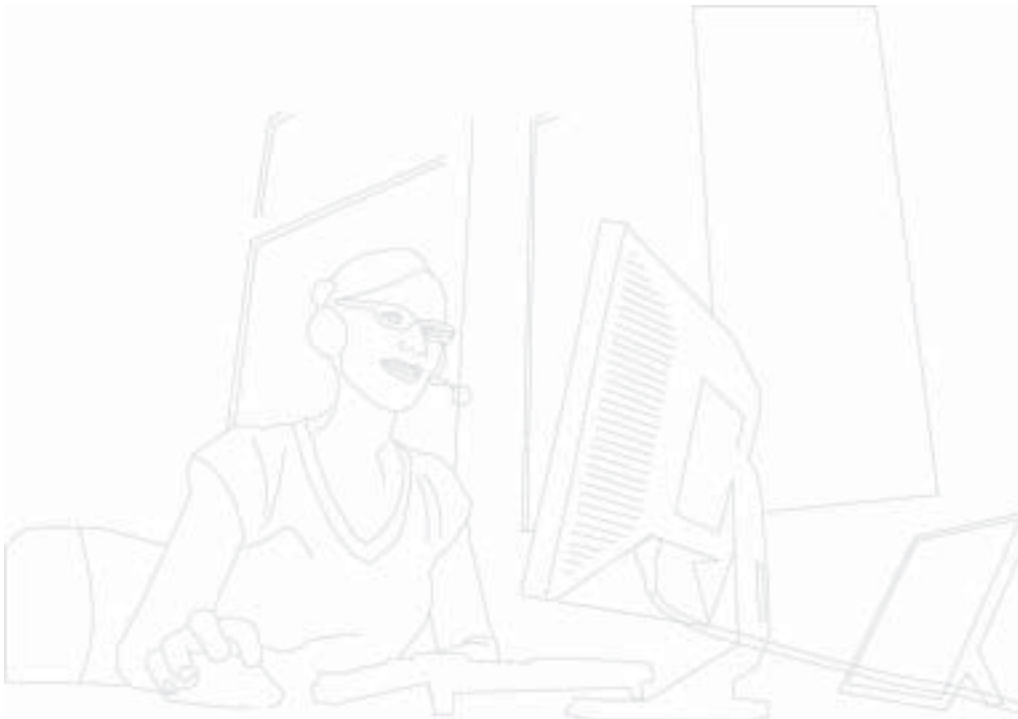
Central to the aims of the Focus on Learning 2 project was that its outcomes should inform future activity not just at individual college level, but also in terms of decisions affecting the sector as a whole.

This section of the report suggests four areas which require a collaborative, strategic approach.

- Sharing the challenge more effectively with employers.
- Qualifications/Certification – Measuring Success.
- Further and deeper collaboration between colleges.
- The development of an action research community in Scotland's Colleges.

## Case Studies

In describing intervention activity, it is all too easy to talk in general terms and lose sight of the individual stories they represent. This report features personal stories which give a flavour of the difference involvement in a Focus on Learning 2 intervention has made to some of our learners.



This work was carried out in a public policy context which places employability at the heart of the drive to promote economic growth and to reduce disadvantage and inequality. Employability is one of the four pillars of the European Employment Strategy and the Scottish Executive shares the UK Government's belief that sustained employment brings about not just economic benefit to the individual and the country, but health and social benefits also.

Improved skills for employability and self-employment are seen as crucial to the success of both *A Smart, Successful Scotland*<sup>1</sup>, the Executive's enterprise strategy, and *Determined to Succeed*<sup>2</sup>, its strategy for enterprise in education. *Life Through Learning Learning Through Life*<sup>3</sup>, the lifelong learning strategy for Scotland, stresses the importance of continuously developing the employability skills of the whole workforce in order to increase participation in economic, social and civic life. Most recently, two further strategies have been published. *Workforce Plus: an Employability Framework for Scotland*<sup>4</sup> aims to reduce the number of people who are workless and on benefits while *More Choices, More Chances*<sup>5</sup> aims to reduce the proportion of 16-19 year olds who are NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training). Both view skills for employment as key to their success.

At the same time, reports from Futureskills Scotland<sup>6</sup> and the Confederation of British Industry<sup>7</sup> argue that employers continue to report deficiencies among existing and potential workers in terms of softer skills.

It was against this background of public policy drivers and reported employability skills gaps that, in 2004, the (then) Scottish Funding Councils for Further and Higher Education<sup>†</sup> published *Learning to Work: Enhancing Employability and Enterprise in Scottish Further and Higher Education*<sup>8</sup>. This paper sought to stimulate discussion about what employability means for further and higher education providers and what approaches should be taken for further development. It has been a key reference document for the Focus on Learning 2 project.

These challenges led to the development of the proposal for Focus on Learning 2: Steps to Employment which sought to apply the successful methodology of the original Focus on Learning initiative to the testing of new ways of embedding employability skills.

<sup>1</sup>Scottish Executive (2001) *A Smart Successful Scotland: Ambitions for the Enterprise Networks*

<sup>2</sup>Scottish Executive (2002) *Determined to Succeed: A Review of Enterprise in Education*

<sup>3</sup>Scottish Executive (2003) *Life through Learning: Learning through Life*

<sup>4</sup>Scottish Executive (2006a) *Workforce Plus: an Employability Framework for Scotland*

<sup>5</sup>Scottish Executive (2006b) *More Choices, More Chances*

<sup>6</sup>Futureskills Scotland (2005) *Skills in Scotland 2004*

<sup>7</sup>Confederation of British Industry (2002) *Submission in response to the Scottish Parliament Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee Inquiry into Lifelong Learning Interim Report*

<sup>8</sup>Scottish Funding Councils for Further and Higher Education (2004) *Learning to Work*

<sup>†</sup> In October 2005 the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council and the Scottish Further Education Funding Council merged to form the Scottish Funding Council

# Executive Summary

The starting point for Focus on Learning 2: Steps to Employment was to recognise that Scotland's Colleges have a long and successful history of preparing learners for the world of work and for assisting those in work to progress in their careers. Effective collaboration with employers has been pivotal to this success. At the same time, it was acknowledged that modern workplaces require new skillsets. They place more emphasis on the softer skills and increasingly these have been found lacking. This presents fresh challenges that must be addressed if colleges are to continue to meet the needs of employers and to help learners to improve their life chances.

Given the leading role of Scotland's Colleges in maintaining an appropriately skilled workforce, the development of learners' capacity to obtain and sustain employment is central to the work of the sector, both as an economic and as a social and personal imperative. Of course, the particular basket of employability skills needed varies from individual to individual and from industry to industry and this is reflected in the diversity of the project interventions. Common to all, though, is the conclusion that the capacity for self-reflection lies at the heart of employability skills development.

The objectives of the project included clarifying terminology and developing practical experiences and approaches to address employability issues.

In the light of their experiences, those who participated in the project have highlighted a number of issues worthy of further exploration and these are listed in this report. The central message emerging from Focus on Learning 2: Steps to Employment is that sustainable improvements to the delivery of employability skills in colleges require an approach that is both collaborative and strategic.



The overarching aim of Focus on Learning 2: Steps to Employment was to secure more effective practice in the development of employability skills in Scotland's Colleges. This aim would be achieved by means of an enhanced learning experience giving learners entering or re-entering the world of work, and those in work who wish to achieve career progression, improved capability in terms of the attributes required to obtain and sustain employability.

### Key objectives of the project were:

- to develop a common understanding of the terms 'employability' and 'employability skills' in terms of criteria which influence learners' success in finding and keeping work;
- to provide learners on selected programmes of study with a learning experience which would enable them to improve their employability;
- to identify the factors within these enhanced programmes which contribute to the improved employability of learners;
- to help learners to develop a greater awareness of the skills and attributes required in the workplace to ensure that they are able to take full advantage of employment and progression opportunities;
- to develop practitioners who have new skills and a higher level of understanding of employability as a set of key skills and behaviours;
- to develop the interface between Scotland's Colleges and industry by focusing on a common agenda.



### Outputs

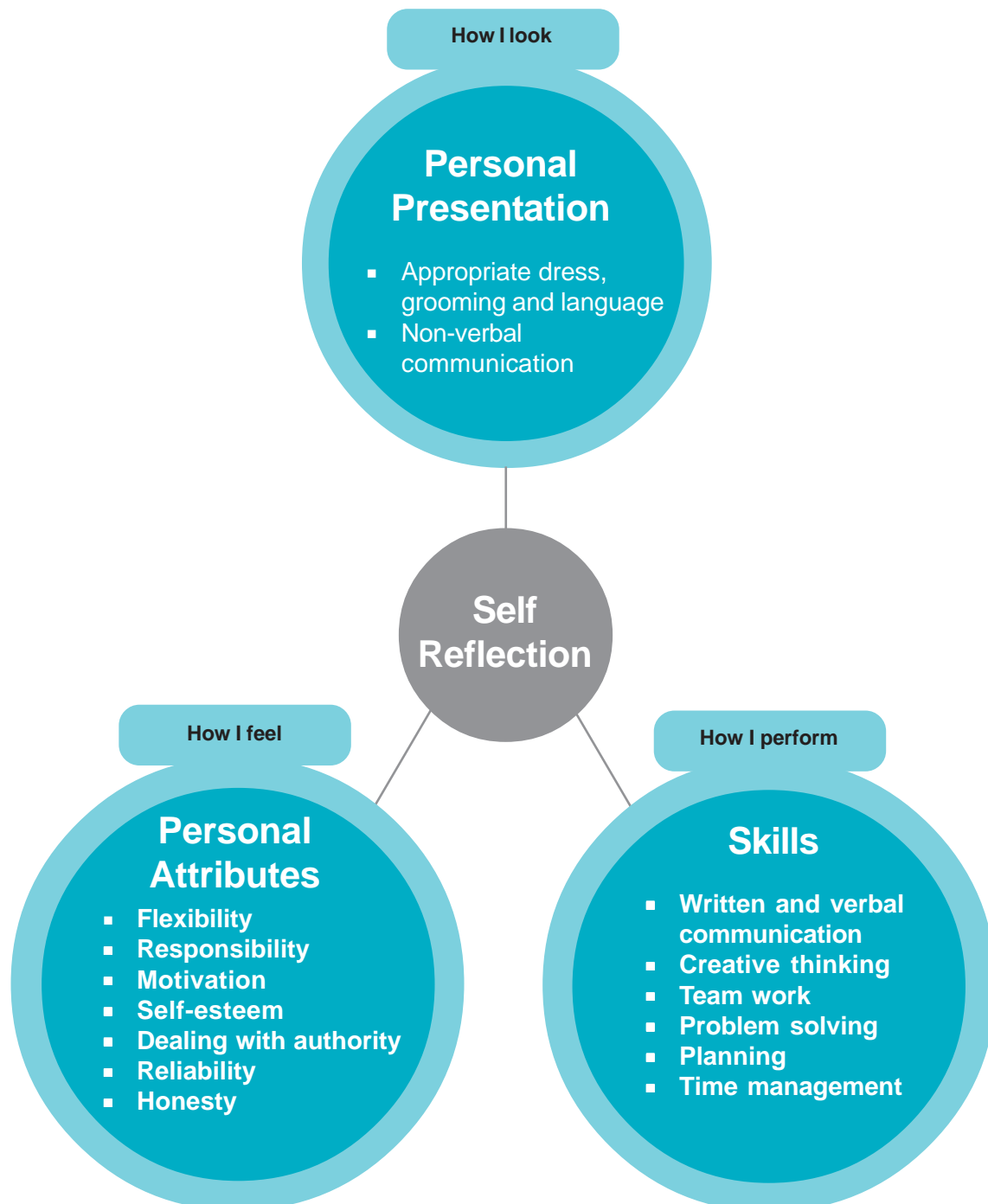
Good practice developed in the course of the project has to be sustainable after the project's conclusion and transferred across the sector as a whole. With this in mind, the project undertook to produce the following outputs:

- an agreed definition and practical description of employability skills;
- a self assessment tool which tests practice against description;
- new learning and teaching materials, practical guides and case studies;
- innovative staff development materials;
- dissemination events and materials.

# The Approach Adopted

## Preparatory Phase

An early task for the project team was to undertake a review of the literature relating to employability and to reach a common understanding of the foundation on which the work of project participants could be built. This helped to distinguish the terms 'employability' and 'employability skills', the former encompassing external factors (such as personal circumstances and the state of the labour market) and technical skills as well as core and soft skills. A graphical representation of our synthesis of employability skills as they relate to the college context was developed.



# Employability Skills Audit

**Course:**

**Audit Date:**

SKILLS	Coverage			Already covered in curriculum or in course culture - evidence	Could be covered in curriculum or culture – brief description	Action points
	V	G	F P			
Written communication						
Verbal communication/ Interacting with others						
Critical thinking/Creative thinking						
Team working						
Problem solving						
Planning and organising						
Time management						
Self reflection/Self awareness						
<b>PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES</b>						
Flexibility						
Taking responsibility for own actions/ development						
Motivation/Positive attitude						
Self esteem/Self confidence						
Reliability						
Honesty						
Dealing with authority						
<b>PERSONAL PRESENTATION</b>						
Appropriate dress, grooming and language						
Non-verbal communication						

The issue of how to measure the impact of interventions designed to develop employability skills was one with which the project had to engage from the outset. A second early task, then, was a review of tools for measuring progress or 'distance travelled' in relation to soft skills. While some existing tools are widely used with particular client groups, it became clear that no single measurement tool could be recommended for general use in colleges, such is the diversity of learners' skill needs. In staff development activity, participants were introduced to some of the guiding sources on this topic and each intervention, as part of its research design, developed its own baseline and progress indicators. Such measurement necessarily took place in a very condensed time-frame, however, and further work would be required to explore the longer-term impact of the interventions.

In February 2005, the first meetings of the Steering Group and Management Group took place and in March 2005, a workshop was held for interested practitioners from the partner colleges. They submitted intervention proposals in April and an Approvals Panel, using clear and transparent criteria, selected 22 interventions from the 44 proposals received.

Intervention teams, comprising both experienced and novice action researchers and supported by research workshops, then undertook their own literature reviews and used a common template to develop their research designs.

Each college appointed a project manager who provided support to participants and attended Management Group meetings. Each partner college was also allocated a mentor who could be called upon to provide research support. In addition, a project website was developed and maintained, providing a further source of information and support.

#### **Delivery Phase**

Further workshops were held to address different aspects of action research (for example, measurement in research, questionnaire design). To ensure that any problems could be dealt with at an early stage, intervention teams submitted rolling action plans which monitored progress against targets.

In February 2006, a mid-point conference was held. Each intervention team produced a mid-point report outlining activity to date and delegates had the opportunity to hear presentations of six of the interventions. This was well attended and warmly received.

#### **Evaluation Phase**

A final workshop on analysing and writing up findings was held and draft reports were produced in June/July 2006. Adjustments were made and final reports were submitted in September 2006, along with case studies, learning and teaching materials and sustainability reports.

#### **Dissemination Phase**

Each partner college has organised local dissemination events for colleagues and local employers. In addition to the main dissemination conference in December 2006, further opportunities to share our findings will be exploited. A presentation was made to the Scottish Executive's Review of Scotland's Colleges team in October and three interventions formed the College Symposium at the SERA (Scottish Education Research Association) conference in November. The project has already been featured in Broadcast and further journal articles will follow. The stakeholders represented in the project's Reference Group are another means of disseminating project outcomes.



Rather than present a set of conclusions at the end of the report, this section brings forward the key messages emerging from Focus on Learning 2: Steps to Employment. These range from reemphasis of approaches previously recognised for their contribution to employability to those that offer a fresh insight into the challenges associated with work in this area. All of the points share a common characteristic – they are important points and prompters that will prove helpful in developing excellent practice in relation to the delivery of employability skills.

## These points are presented in relation to two simple questions:

1. What did we learn from individual interventions?
2. What have we learned together as partners?

### What did we learn from individual interventions?

- The particular needs of individuals and vocational sectors must be understood and taken into account in planning employability activity.
- Reflection on the learning and teaching process is at the heart of enhancing practice in this area.
- A favourable context is created when both tutors and learners are open to change.
- We have much to learn from elsewhere and activity should be informed by what others have done in the field.
- A systematic approach to development will help ensure that changes in practice are sustainable and transferable.
- Practitioners should be prepared to take bold steps to redesign the curriculum in innovative ways to embed employability skills.
- Employability skills can be effectively incorporated in new and innovative learning and teaching materials.
- Self-reflection – the capacity to reflect on where we have been, where we are, where we want to go and what we must do to get there - lies at the heart of effective activity.
- Practitioners should be prepared to take risks, to make shifts in the learner/lecturer relationship.
- Effective employability work is team work and requires the sustained commitment of staff involved.

- Our service to learners and employers is enhanced by collaboration with other colleges and with other partners such as SFEU.
- The appropriate way to measure soft skills varies and a flexible approach should be adopted.
- Effective interventions are developed on the basis of what employers tell us they need, not what we think they need.
- Employability activity is greatly enhanced by employer involvement.
- Sharing experiences and findings with colleagues at all stages informs activity and facilitates transfer of good practice.

### What have we learned together as partners?

- The skills required to enhance employability overlap with those required for effective learning; enhancing employability skills should help develop better lifelong learners and more reflective practitioners.
- An individual's employability skill needs will vary over time and contexts but the capacity for self-reflection and evaluation is always at the heart of successful development.
- Time for reflection, preparation and evaluation is crucial to the development of successful and sustainable changes to practice.
- Undertaking action research requires new staff skills and ongoing support.
- There is a need to find a way of mapping initiatives being undertaken by different institutions/agencies across the country and sharing experiences.
- Employer involvement is helped by sustained contact and if they recognise a real and significant benefit to their business.
- The collaborative model brings significant benefits in terms of providing a forum for sharing important lessons and avoiding duplication of effort.
- While no single tool for measuring soft skills or distance travelled can be recommended for use in colleges, appropriate measures can be designed for particular client groups.
- The tension between students' demands and employers' needs is always present, as is the requirement on colleges to balance the employability agenda with others, such as the social inclusion and community agendas.

# Common Themes and Issues

When the outcomes of the interventions are analysed collectively, several recurrent themes and issues are evident. These are synthesised below to give key messages to assist the transfer of practice.

Ten guiding principles for those planning, developing and delivering programmes with a particular focus on employability:

- E**mphasise the relevance of employability skills to learners' chosen vocational area and be persistent in reinforcing relevance messages; benefits may not be immediately obvious to learners.
- M**ake reflection the focus of each stage of the learning process, for both learners and tutors.
- P**romote positive self-esteem, an enhancer not just of employability, but of effective learning generally.
- L**earn to be open to changes in methods and styles of delivery.
- O**vercome negativity in poorly-motivated learners at high risk of drop-out.
- Y**ield greater control of the learning process to learners.
- M**aintain the commitment of both tutors and learners.
- E**ngage with employers not just as consultants, but as active participants.
- N**urture learner/tutor rapport and trust.
- T**ailor provision to individual learner needs.

The project does not seek to generalise findings, but simply to share the innovative practice of colleges in piloting new ways of embedding employability skills in the curriculum. The extent to which these initiatives are transferred and sustained will be the measure of the success of the Focus on Learning 2: Steps to Employment project.

# Project Activity: The Interventions

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In this section, the 22 intervention teams present a brief summary of their interventions, grouped around the following themes:

## **Communication and Interview Performance**

- Targeting Employability.
- Core Skills for Real.
- Communication for Work.
- Interviews for Success.

## **Core Skills**

- For Life.
- Team Play.
- An integrated approach to learning.

## **Employability Skills and Additional Learning Needs**

- Therapy to Employment.
- Moving towards Work.

## **Employability Skills for 'New Scots'**

- Life and Work in Britain.
- Fresh Start. From Refuge to Employment.

## **Employment in Practice**

- Motivate Me and I'll Succeed.
- Personal Development. The Focus for Business Success.
- Managing Me.

## **Self Awareness and Personal Development**

- Citizenship. Making ready for Employment.
- Improving Skills for Learning and Work.
- Mind Matters.
- Working with Emotional Intelligence.
- Learning for Life.
- Motivated to Succeed.

## **What does Employability mean?**

- Developing a College Strategy for Employment.
- Employability Skills. What are they and can they be taught.

## TARGETING EMPLOYABILITY

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### Purpose

To improve the prospects of Army Preparation Course learners when attending Recruitment Selection for the Army, focusing particularly on identified key employability skills of: Confidence, Motivation, Team Working, Ability to Learn and Verbal Communication.

### Outline

Some potential recruits were unsuccessful during the selection process because they lacked the confidence to contribute ideas or to mix with team members. Communication materials previously used lacked relevance and learner engagement.

### The intervention sought to address the following questions:

- Can contextualised materials enhance identified Employability Skills?
- Can practical assessment enhance identified Employability Skills?
- Can reflective learning enhance identified Employability Skills?

### Intervention Activity

- Army Personnel questionnaire and focus group identified employability skills most relevant to an Army career and informed development of Communication resources.
- Recorded observation by Intervention Team and Army Personnel of:
  - where and when learners displayed a lack of confidence;
  - where and when they lacked motivation;
  - learner response to certain situations (interviews, activity days).
- Constant reflection by Intervention Team through informal focus groups based upon recorded observations.
- Student questionnaires and focus groups.
- College lecturers' participation in Residential Week which integrated Writing and Talking and Listening assessments.

## JOHN'S STORY

**John arrived at college to join the Army Preparation Course (APC) a few months after leaving school. He had attended and failed Army Recruit Selection twice previously due to lack of confidence in himself and his ability to work in a team with people he did not know. These are key skills sought by the Army at the Selection Centre.**

This resulted in low self-esteem, which impacted on other areas of his life, such as behaviour. John was a prime example of a learner who needed to develop the specific employability skills identified by Focus on Learning 2, and reflect upon what were his positive skills and qualities in order to boost his self-esteem.

### Involvement in Focus on Learning 2

The newly developed Communication materials were written to help a learner track their development and reflect upon experiences when they put the necessary skills into use. At the beginning of the course John

struggled to deliver an icebreaker, a two minute presentation about his background and interest in the army to his new classmates. He found it difficult to find five strengths, or five things he was good at.

The experience of the APC, and in particular the Residential Week which comes in week eight of the 13-week course, transformed John. During the Residential Week, when learners are immersed in army life, they are encouraged to keep a reflective log. John came to our reflection slot each evening, brimming with enthusiasm and full of the experiences and challenges he had faced that day. He became good at identifying which skills and qualities he used in various activities, as he had now been given the opportunity to think about how well he had performed and had also received feedback on this.

John delivered an Icebreaker that same week to his Residential Team, which included learners from other colleges and not just his own classmates. He made a great job of stating why he felt he was suited to army life, his job choice and how he had been better preparing for the

Selection Centre.

### Enhanced Employability

At the end of the 13 week course, we were confident that John was ready to face the Selection Centre again. He had a wealth of valuable learning experiences behind him that he could reflect upon during his interview. His self-esteem had soared and he could deal with authority. He even gave a presentation about Residential Week at his Graduation Ceremony. At this ceremony, the guests include parents and guardians of the learners, senior college staff and a range of army personnel. John had a long conversation with a senior member of the Regimental Recruiting Team that evening, who was impressed with his maturity and confidence.

When John attended Recruit Selection a few weeks later, he passed. He enlisted shortly after that with The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the Royal Regiment of Scotland, The Black Watch. He recently completed phase one of his basic training.

**Adam Smith College  
Targeting Employability**

## Outcomes

- 19% increase in learners successful at Recruit Selection and enlisting into the Army.
- 55% increase in learners achieving Core Skill Communication at Intermediate 1 level.
- Indicators of enhanced engagement with literacy.
- Contextualised learning and teaching materials - set in an Armed Forces or Army Preparation context with relevant literature, links and tasks provided.
- Reflective learning resources, including Residential Logbook and 'Reflection Slots'.
- Practical assessment delivered out of the classroom, in the Army context.
- Strong, inter-disciplinary delivery team forged.
- Significant staff development in terms of new approaches to teaching and new relationships with learners.
- Stronger partnership forged with targeted employer, Armed Forces personnel.

## Embedding and Disseminating

- Reflection, self-assessing and tracking development are significant tools in enhancing employability and consideration is being given to using these methods with other learner groups.
- While it is acknowledged that not every programme presents the learning opportunities of a Residential Week, some of the approaches used there can be adapted for use with learner groups of similar profiles.
- Lessons learned are being shared with colleagues of other vocational areas.

## Main Lessons

- The obvious and close partnership between college staff and the potential employer helps learners to understand the relevance of college learning to their chosen career.
- For these learners, the optimum time to assess Communication skills is during practical activity, when motivation and confidence run high and can be harnessed and recorded.
- Building in regular opportunities for reflection allowed changes to be made to resources and schedules of work and meant the team was able to react quickly to new developments in the Army Recruitment process.
- More provision needed for more able learners.
- Further research could track the progress of learners who have progressed into employment to see if they continue to use and transfer these employability skills.

## Quotes from Learners

- "I am able to stand in front of people and speak about myself."
- "I enjoyed it much more than English at school as the work was based around the Army."
- "As you got further through the course, you started noticing things about yourself that you didn't know."



## CORE SKILLS FOR REAL

David Neilson - Cardonald College

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### Purpose

To investigate the impact of diagnosis and tailored intervention on writing skills of Intermediate 2 English learners in General Education.

### Outline

Written communication skills are key to successful employment in many areas and are delivered in the component unit English: Language Study (D8VH11). However, each student has different gaps of knowledge and skill in terms of spelling, grammar, sentence construction, etc, and this intervention sought to diagnose these and then make available tailored responses to these individual needs.

### Intervention Activity

- Issues of accuracy in written English were analysed and recorded in individualised folders.
- Tailored materials were developed and made available to help learners address these individually diagnosed writing issues.
- Writing skills were assessed on entrance and exit performance was recorded, giving a measure of individual improvement.
- Student achievement was described in practical terms of sentence construction, spelling, punctuation, etc, rather than in 'catch-all' criteria terms, giving the learner a statement of achievement which potential employers can readily understand and appreciate.
- A survey of 50 employers regarding certificate information was carried out.

### Outcomes

- Performance indicators do not provide any evidence that the intervention in its current form has a significant positive effect on formal assessment performance.
- Learners expressed very positive regard for individualised language activity of this kind.
- Employer response suggests some dissatisfaction with current certificate information with regard to writing skills.
- Tutors and learners appreciated the structured approach to covering gaps in learner knowledge and found it a useful reference point for subsequent work.
- Learners reported improved ability and confidence in essay-writing which they believed had spin-off benefits for other subject areas.

### Embedding and Disseminating

- Opportunities to extend the approach to further groups are being investigated.
- Online provision is being explored.
- Lessons learned are being shared with colleagues.

### Main Lessons

- Students are often well aware of writing skills gaps and value a structured approach to addressing them.
- There is scope for further consultation with employers with regard to appropriate certification which gives an accurate description of candidates' written communication skills.



## COMMUNICATION AT WORK

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### Purpose

- To improve the communication skills – and hence the employability – of the Pre-Vocational Construction and Introduction to Care groups at Dumfries and Galloway College.
- Communication at Work was about increasing learners' awareness of the communication skills required in the vocational area for which they are training as a means of countering the oft heard question, "What has this to do with ....."?

### Outline

- The goal was to produce up-to-date video clips that deal with issues surrounding communications in the workplace.
- The aim was to establish a clear link between the Communication curriculum and the vocational needs of the Construction and Care sectors. If the learners do not believe the lecturer then someone else needs to tell them.
- This is a way of having the employer in the classroom but reducing the need to call the employer into the classroom several times a year.

### Intervention Activity

- The intervention leader and members of the ICT team met with employers, or their representatives, and interviews were recorded.
- These interviews provided clear affirmations of the place of communication skills - in terms of employability - within the Construction and Care industries. They were digitally recorded and then presented in DVD and online formats.
- The materials formed the basis of preparation for the assessment of Communication, Intermediate 1, Outcome 3 – the mock job interview.

- The video clips and supporting materials were presented as part of the Communication delivery instead of the usual materials.

### Outcomes

- Communication at Work has achieved a positive impact in terms of learner achievement, opinion and appreciation of employability skills.
- Lecturing staff have gained valuable teaching resources which embed the employability aspect of Communication firmly in the curriculum, at the same time as contributing to the college's long-term ICT strategy.
- Positive relations between the college and local employers have been enhanced.

### Embedding and Disseminating

- The prospect of cross-college development of the basic premise of Communication at Work has also been considered, as the materials have been developed with a generic structure in place which allows for future dissemination to other subject areas.

### Main Lessons

- The success of this intervention depended on the enthusiasm and commitment of both course team and employers.
- Easy and flexible access to ICT support staff who can produce a polished article are essential.
- This type of material takes a lot of time to develop and takes longer than anticipated but is worth doing. This year the materials will be in place on time and will, it is hoped, prove to be even more beneficial.

## STEVEN'S STORY

**Steven was a Pre-Vocational Construction student who struggled with both the Reading and Writing outcomes within Communication Intermediate 1. He was receiving additional support from specialist staff in the College's Independent Learning Centre and benefited from additional lecturer and peer support in the classroom. However, he admitted that he couldn't see the relevance of Communication in terms of employability skills and this undoubtedly affected both his level of motivation and his performance in the Unit.**

New learning materials were

developed to address these challenges. Presentations by Marion Gracie of Ian Gracie Specialist Contractors and by Ian Wells from the Construction Industry Training Board offered clear affirmations of the place of Communication skills within the construction industry. The collection of learning materials also incorporates key exemplars – CVs, application forms, personal statements, job descriptions - and thus highlights context and relevance and the ongoing communication requirements that form part of the job in the Construction industry.

The new materials formed the basis of preparation for the

assessment of Communication, Intermediate 1, Outcome 3 – the mock job interview.

Following the delivery of the intervention and Steven's excellent performance in the final, mock interview assessment, he not only achieved the Unit - which he had previously thought was beyond his capabilities - but he admitted that he would find what he had learned from the Focus on Learning 2 materials useful when attending interviews for an apprenticeship.

He has since gained a bricklaying apprenticeship with a prominent local employer.

**Communication at Work,  
Dumfries Galloway**

## INTERVIEWS FOR SUCCESS

Hayley Rushton-Davis - Dumfries & Galloway College rushton-davish@dumgal.ac.uk

### Purpose

To increase learners' employability skills, with particular emphasis on preparing for employment interviews through:

- participation in interviews (before and after training);
- undertaking self evaluation activities;
- completing a series of training events focusing on different aspects of the employment interview process.

### Outline

In Focus on Learning, experiential learning theory and application were introduced to the subject classroom. This intervention extended this to a Guidance role. Many learners have little or no experience of the employment interview process. Through this intervention, the learners would work through the experiential learning cycle to develop employability skills relating to:

- how I look;
- how I feel;
- how I perform.

### The anticipated learner outcomes included:

- identify and use key communication skills, including body language and presentation skills;
- practise a range of probing interview questions and styles;
- reduce the fear factor of the interview process by increased awareness;
- reflect upon employer feedback;
- evaluate their individual performance and observed improvement;
- improve interview performance;
- gain confidence and motivation.

### Intervention Activity

- Each learner participated in a mock interview situation without any prior learning or training. Each learner completed an application form, or produced a CV, for a post related to their course. The local Careers Adviser, at this stage a stranger to the students, conducted the interview.
- The learner then reflected upon their performance in the interview by completing a perception questionnaire. The interviewer also completed the same questionnaire so that comparisons between employer and learner perceptions could be made.

- The learner was then interviewed using the Rickter Scale as a means of measuring confidence and motivation.
- The learners then completed a series of supported workshop activities undertaken during the Guidance Tutorial time.
- Finally, the learners reapplied for the same post, this time being interviewed by a real local employer.
- Again the learner and employer completed the perception questionnaire and the learner was again interviewed using the Rickter Scale.

### Outcomes

- Clearer understanding of employer expectations.
- More confidence in preparing and participating in interviews.
- Improvement in performance during interviews.

### Embedding and Disseminating

The Personal Tutor programme has just been reviewed at Senior Management level and aspects of the intervention have been included, but it is unclear at this stage whether this particular approach will be pursued.

Events are programmed as part of the staff development programme to share the experiences and allow staff to ask questions.

### Main Lessons

- Time consuming to arrange the interviews but really rewarding for the learners, particularly those with no experience of the employment interview process.
- Timing of this process is important to maintain momentum and also to avoid any conflict with assessments if possible.
- Tutors need to be enthusiastic and committed to the process to ensure that the learners perceive its importance and give it value.

# FOR LIFE: FOCUS ON RELEVANT LEARNING INTERVENTION FOR EMPLOYMENT

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### Purpose

To improve the motivation, attitude and course success rate of learners undertaking the NC Leading Sport programme and thereby enhance their success in progressing to and remaining in higher education or employment.

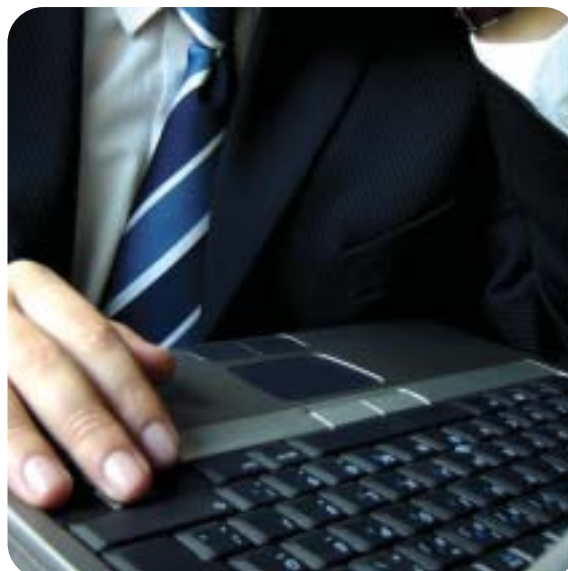
### Outline

Learners on this programme sometimes lack drive and do not understand the relevance of some subjects and how subjects are inter-related.

Delivery of the NC Leading Sport programme was extensively redesigned. A proportion of the units was redeveloped to be delivered in an integrative way and in a practical learning environment, with minimal formal classroom teaching. A much more dynamic and interactive approach was developed, incorporating a wide range of learning styles.

### Intervention Activity

- Whole team approach.
- Redeveloped, cross-unit learning and teaching materials integrated in a Student Log Book.
- Comprehensive schedule of work developed along with teaching pack for delivering lecturers which runs in parallel to the Student Log Book.
- Traditionally 'classroom' topics delivered in a sporting environment and context.
- Employer liaison.
- Staff SWOT analyses.
- Student engagement and reflection via:
  - critical incident questionnaire;
  - participation questionnaire;
  - course evaluation;
  - student journal;
  - student interviews;
  - course review meetings.
- Comparison with non-intervention groups.



### Outcomes

- Positive response from both staff and learners to integrated approach, supported by Log Book.
- Some indicators that the intervention group benefited in terms of enjoyment, motivation and ability to apply knowledge and skills to practical work.
- Redeveloped, integrated, interactive learning and teaching materials.
- Team teaching provided new opportunities for staff to review and evaluate together.
- Better staff understanding of whole programme content and how linkages can be made.
- Staff perception of improved learners preparedness for progression to HN study.
- Improved links with employers.

# Core Skills for Employability

## Embedding and Disseminating

A comprehensive resource to support this approach is now in place. The team is making amendments to materials so as to extend and improve the impact of the intervention for future learners.

### Changes include:

- reducing the frequency of questionnaire and log book completion;
- adding a word bank to aid completion of questionnaires and journals;
- discontinuing the participation questionnaire;
- developing more interactive activities, further reducing 'classroom' approaches;
- the Institute of Tourism and Sport is actively working towards incorporating elements of the intervention in other programmes;
- development of materials as online resource now underway;
- lessons learned are being shared with colleagues.

## Main Lessons

- Need to avoid overload of student reflection and feedback opportunities: creates too much data for staff to analyse and quality reduces.
- Learners need guidance on how to 'sell' improved employability to prospective employers.
- The integrated approach can mean it is difficult for learners to be clear about what they have achieved and how activities fit together; a progression/achievement monitoring system which learners can access is being developed.
- Staff development required so that lecturers do not simply continue to deliver in the 'traditional' way in the new environment.
- The integrated approach requires careful consideration of assessment scheduling so as to avoid overload towards the end of the course; integrated assessments spread evenly across the year are being developed.
- The reasons for learner disengagement are multi-variate and this intervention can be only one strand of the solution. Further investigation of reasons for disengagement resulting in withdrawal is required.

## Quotes

- "The class was fun, with sports as well as writing."
- "Classes are linked and related to each other."



## TEAM PLAY

Colin Maxwell - Adam Smith College

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### Purpose

To help learners gain and practise identified employability skills using a specially designed computer game.

### Outline

While computer games have been attacked for encouraging violence and anti-social behaviour, studies have indicated that specially designed games can offer a more engaging and motivational classroom experience for acquiring certain employability skills than many other learning and teaching methods.

This intervention aimed to improve the skills of Working with Others, Problem Solving and Communication in non-advanced students by using a specially designed team-based computer game in the classroom.

### Intervention Activity

The Team Play Hotel computer game was developed. The running of a hotel was considered an appropriate scenario as it has broad appeal, provides a variety of tasks for players, avoids gender issues and is one which most students and lecturers can relate to.

### There was:

- pre and post intervention self-assessment by learners of relevant employability skills;
- staff training on use of the game;
- team Play Hotel trialled with 16 students, all studying computing-related courses (SCQF levels 5-8) (though the game is designed for use by learners of any discipline);
- feedback obtained by means of learner and staff questionnaires and focus groups and observation.

### Outcomes

- Team Play Hotel game developed and piloted.
- Positive feedback from learners and staff; whereas traditional core skills delivery was described as 'dull' or 'boring', learners were keen to take part in the game and to improve their performance.
- Indicators of enhanced learner understanding of team working and different team roles in a work context.
- New staff understandings of computer games as a learning and teaching resource and of key employability skills.

### Embedding and Disseminating

- The game has generated a great deal of interest from colleagues and other organisations, suggesting that it merits further research and development.
- Learners have provided substantial feedback and have made many suggestions for further enhancements to the game which will be incorporated in future versions.
- The game will be trialled with new student groups at the start of session 2006/07 and further analysis of its effectiveness will be conducted.
- Additional guidelines are required for staff on how to make best use of the game and how to better integrate it into a teaching plan. A framework within which to use the game is being developed.
- Lessons learned are being shared with colleagues.

### Main Lessons

- The design and development of this game took eight months. This design stage is crucial so that the pitfalls of other educational games can be avoided.
- It was vital to avoid reliance on specialist or high specification computer equipment to maximise potential for classroom use.
- Effectiveness depends on integrating Team Play Hotel into learners' curriculum; it is not intended as a stand-alone, 'bolt-on' resource.
- Requiring players to conduct all communications verbally avoids reliance on a network and has the additional benefit of developing verbal communication skills.
- The game approach is particularly useful for learners who have little or no experience of team working in an employment context.
- The game provides a common frame of reference to which lecturers and learners can refer in future learning.
- Student feedback suggests that the game should be used earlier in the course as it highlighted areas such as planning which proved to be important as the course progressed.
- There could be merit in using Team Play Hotel as an icebreaker for new student groups.

## INTEGRATED APPROACH TO LEARNING

Lucy Rough - Reid Kerr

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### Purpose

To improve student employability, attainment and achievement by integrating literacy and numeracy into the delivery of the vocational curriculum.

### Outline

To achieve the above by:

- bringing a specialist literacy/numeracy (CAVSS) tutor into the vocational training environment to team-teach using the CAVSS methodology;
- teaching the literacy/numeracy processes that learners need in order to pass the course at the point at which they need to apply them in course activities;
- facilitating dialogue and discussion, and modelling collaborative problem solving, within the group;
- making literacy/numeracy support a normal part of the training for all learners. No-one is singled out for help.



### Intervention Activity

- The CAVSS tutor met regularly with the Catering lecturer to identify literacy/numeracy processes demanded by teaching and assessment activities that students find difficult.
- A team approach to the delivery of vocational training was implemented for four hours each week covering theory and practical sessions.
- The vocational lecturer delivered the lesson as usual, handing over to the CAVSS tutor to revise and reteach literacy/numeracy processes as required.
- The two lecturers interacted, asked questions of each other and the students, and modelled collaborative problem-solving which required the application of literacy/numeracy processes to an industry problem.
- Questionnaires were administered on three separate occasions to students to establish distance travelled in terms of levels of numeracy and literacy skills and self-confidence.
- Student behaviour was directly observed by internal departmental staff and staff external to the department.

## ALAN'S STORY

**My name is Alan. I am 16. I came to college straight from school with no qualifications, angry about everything, especially authority and school.**

I came to college because I wanted to become a chef, but I did not want to do anything apart from cooking.

I objected to any type of 'schoolie' subjects, so I did not want to go to a classroom to do Core Skills because it reminded me of bad experiences I had at school. It wasn't like that though. The Core Skills were brought into the kitchen and it seemed more realistic. I learned communication, numeracy, and problem solving skills without really realising I was being taught.

I used to be very negative about

everything. But the questionnaires and interviews and talking about what I've learned has made me think I can get a good job if I try hard enough. I feel better about myself – more confident and keen to do well. I think I am a good worker now.

I think I've changed a lot since this time last year. I started a part time job at the end of May in a busy local hotel and I've come back to college for the second year Hospitality course. In April, I organised a demonstration in a local hotel. I had to plan a one hour slot to give a presentation and practical demonstration to twelve fifteen year olds. I had to manage the time and work with other people. It went really well and I didn't need a lot of

help. It gave me a real buzz and made me feel more confident.

The 15 year olds I was demonstrating to were very similar to where I was eight months previously. Now I was the confident and motivated presenter.

I still have my part time job and my tutor sometimes speaks to my boss. She was pleased when he said: "Lucy, send me more boys like him. I can trust him to be left alone".

I don't think he would have said that last August.

**Reid Kerr College  
An Integrated Approach to  
Learning**

## Outcomes

- Improved attainment reflected in all learners achieving units on their course which resulted in overall 75% achievement, compared to 10% in the comparison group.
- Retention reflected in only two learners leaving the course compared to a much higher figure in the comparison group.
- Discipline reflected in no formal disciplining of learners required and no suspensions (3 learners suspended in comparison group).
- Attitude evidenced in quotes such as 'enthusiastic and willing' from staff involved in observing learners.
- Questionnaires revealed that learners perceived that their soft skills, literacy and numeracy had all improved.
- Improved confidence reflected in group cohesiveness and collaboration, and voluntary participation by learners in a number of community events.

## Embedding and Disseminating

- CAVSS is now being delivered in three industry training courses at Reid Kerr College, with plans to expand provision.
- Staff now members of the Scottish CAVSS Network.
- Vocational lecturers are involved in training literacy/numeracy specialists in the CAVSS method, and disseminating information about CAVSS at local and national forums.

## Main Lessons

- Learners are enthusiastic about literacy/numeracy support when it is presented as a normal part of their studies.
- Teaching literacy/numeracy in direct relationship to the vocational course delivery maximises the relevance and transferability of that support.
- CAVSS improves the dynamic within the group and learners' behaviour and motivation, as learners replicate lecturers' interaction and interest.
- Hospitality Department staff experienced an effective new approach to addressing literacy and numeracy issues.
- Learners' college experience has been enhanced and soft skills improved.
- The intervention demonstrated that using the CAVSS method to teach literacy and numeracy can be very successful and appears to be a more logical method.
- This method allowed learners to develop their literacy and numeracy skills in a more meaningful and less painful way.



## FROM THERAPY TO EMPLOYMENT

Mary Campbell - Aberdeen College

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### Purpose

To improve the employability skills of adults with additional learning needs by working with Caring Agencies, Educational Development Officers and prospective employers to open up the employment arena to these learners.

### Outline

- Past experience had shown instances of learners in the above category returning to college year after year, participating in the many and varied courses on offer, but in effect making little progress towards employability.
- The aim of the project was to alter this situation by the provision of a classroom based replica of the workplace and the subsequent transfer of skills learned in that environment to a supported employment facility in the community.

### Intervention Activity

- The skill area selected for the intervention was sewing and associated crafts. The early part of the course was used to assess the individual skills of the learners and monitor their soft skills such as timekeeping, communication and team skills.
- The learners practised the various roles which they would be expected to fulfil in the workplace, allowing the tutor to identify the best role for each individual.
- These roles were then transferred to the workplace, ie the supported employment facility.
- Learners were asked to complete diaries recording their existing abilities, goals, progress and achievement of skills. They also completed questionnaires at several points throughout the intervention to measure soft skills improvement.
- The workplace also completed monthly appraisals of each learner.



## AGNES'S STORY

**Agnes is a timid, friendly, middle-aged woman with moderate learning difficulties. She lives in supported accommodation with a small group of similarly disabled adults. She attends various activity groups in Stonehaven throughout the week when she is not at Woodview Crafts or at college.**

Agnes has been attending Aberdeen college on and off for a number of years, participating in a variety of therapeutic and self improvement courses which, to all intents and purposes, served as means of filling her otherwise mundane week.

On taking up part time supported employment at Woodview Crafts two years ago, Agnes



demonstrated the potential to make this employment successful, given appropriate support. Staff working with Agnes realised this and approached the college to find out what could be done to assist Agnes and others like her to improve their skills. Subsequently, Agnes was enrolled on the Introduction to Textile Crafts course which had been redesigned as part of the Focus on Learning 2 project to make it more employability-oriented.

Although initially apprehensive and lacking in confidence, Agnes soon displayed signs of being a good team player and willing to learn and to undertake a variety of new tasks. Very soon, we began to get reports of Agnes having

successfully transferred the newly acquired skills to her workplace. She also began to assist her less able peers, both in class and at work.

Agnes's confidence has improved immensely and she has become one of the most enthusiastic students in her group. She has become more proactive in the day-to-day activities at Woodview Crafts and has been involved in several of their promotional events over the past year. She has become a greatly valued employee.

Agnes's confidence and determination today is such that she has now undertaken another course at college this year to further improve her skills.

She has just begun her SVQ Level 1 in Manufacturing Textiles.

**Aberdeen College  
Therapy to Employment**

# Employability Skills and Additional Learning Needs

## Outcomes

### The criteria for success were:

- attendance;
  - transferred skills;
  - improved standard of product.
- 
- The end of intervention review indicated that attendance throughout the intervention had been excellent, skills learnt at college had been successfully transferred to the workplace and the standard of product had improved immensely.
  - Over 50% of the learners who completed the course were identified as suitable for progression to SVQ Level 1.
  - All students displayed distinguishable improvement in their social interaction, teamwork, confidence, motivation and sharing of responsibilities.

## Embedding and Disseminating

- Given that the overall result was so encouraging, a similar approach will be utilised with as many of the area's future courses as possible. This has already taken place with some learners working in Retail.

## Main Lessons

- The main lesson has been that employability skills and soft skills can be improved by replicating conditions in the workplace as far as possible and by constant reinforcement of newly acquired skills.
- In addition, the building of useful partnerships has enhanced our ability to prepare and plan a curriculum more appropriate to both the student body and to the current move towards employment for the less advantaged individuals in society.



## MOVING TOWARDS WORK

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### Purpose

To explore how employability skills can be embedded into the curriculum of learners with severe and complex needs to assist them in gaining supported work experience.

### Outline

These learners have spent their formative years attending special schools and have significant difficulties in reading, comprehension, short and long term memory, sometimes compounded by physical or sensory impairment. These difficulties mean that in the past they may not have had the opportunity of accessing supported employment.

### The intervention aimed to ease the transition into supported employment by:

- creating appropriate learning and teaching materials to improve basic skills, personal presentation, timekeeping, travel skills and understanding of the workplace;
- providing work placements supported by class teacher as mentor/work coach;
- creating a DVD of work experiences to reinforce key messages.

### Intervention Activity

- New learning and teaching materials, strong on pictorial representation, developed and delivered.
- Use of the Internet to browse potential work placement sites and to stimulate class discussion.
- Creation of bank of potential employer placements.
- Visits to employers.
- Work placement accompanied by class teacher in role of mentor/work coach.
- Performance assessment at work using log books, observation and digital recording.
- Learner assistance in scripting and shooting DVD clips.
- Student work linked to SQA unit, *Sampling Work* (D9ER07).
- Pre and post placement learner self-evaluation.
- Weekly meetings of intervention team.

### Outcomes

- New learning and teaching materials and approaches, embedding employability skills.
- Six (of eight) learners attended work placements.

- Digital record of learner experiences in the classroom and in the workplace.
- Improved links with potential employers/work experience providers.
- Increased employer awareness of client group's needs.
- Positive responses from learners, parents, supervisors and employers.
- Strong delivery team who will develop this approach.

### Embedding and Disseminating

- The current group (who are returning to college next year) will be followed up and the intervention will be extended to a new group.
- The DVD will enable future cohorts to see their peers in the workplace and allow other interested organisations to view the project.
- Future development will include progressively withdrawing the mentor support to see if the learner copes independently.
- Lessons learned are being shared with colleagues.

### Main Lessons

- Developing materials which do not rely heavily on reading and writing skills is pivotal to success with this cohort.
- The timescale required for this activity was under-estimated.
- A better model would involve a wider range of staff.
- A 'bolt-on' approach would not have worked. Development of soft skills had to be threaded through the curriculum.
- DVD was an appropriate way to track individual success stories and changes in behaviour and learners were enthusiastic about recording, but it added a degree of difficulty in terms of time required to script, film and edit.
- Lecturer-mentor support, in providing a link between college and the workplace, was crucial to learner success and to employer co-operation but is expensive. Ways of taking forward this model are being explored.
- Need to track learners over a period of time to gain better view of success of intervention and to see if work placements are sustained.

## LIFE AND WORK IN BRITAIN : EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS STUDYING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Eileen Forbes - Aberdeen College

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### Purpose

To improve the employability skills of students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL). These students face additional barriers to employment because English is not their first language. The intervention was designed to address their lack of confidence to communicate effectively along with their need to become more aware of UK culture in relation to job finding skills.

### Outline

The intervention was embedded in a recently added optional class in the EFL curriculum – Life and Work in Britain. This unit aims to introduce international students to a variety of aspects of British culture, including topical subjects relating to society and politics as well as local issues that may be of interest.

The intervention focused on the cultural aspects of working in the UK as a strand among a range of topics. It covered theoretical knowledge of social structures and systems, for example, how to apply for a National Insurance Number, how and where to look for work, how to access childcare, etc.

The core skills of Communication, IT, Working with Others and Problem Solving were incorporated into the teaching delivery as well as the soft skills of Oral Presentation and Planning and Organising.

### Intervention Activity

The Life and Work in Britain classes ran between August 2005 and July 2006 with the employability focus embedded in the middle section of the course. It ran concurrently with two groups, one whose level of English was described as Intermediate and the other as Upper Intermediate/Advanced. Each class met twice per week and for the second class both groups were brought together for the purposes of having guest speakers address them.

Subjects for study were chosen taking into account information supplied by the students at the start of the course. Areas of study included:

- job vocabulary;
- legal aspects of working in the UK;
- writing a CV;
- finding a vacancy;
- applying for a vacancy;
- racial harassment in the workplace;
- rights and responsibilities in the workplace
- confidence building and assertiveness training;
- preparing for an interview;
- presentation skills.

## JENNY'S STORY

**My experience so far finding work in the UK has been quite difficult. Firstly, the requirements are very high in that most employers ask for certificates in qualified areas. If you do not have the right qualifications, it is hard to get work experience and training. In Malaysia it is quite different. Employers only require work experience. Qualifications are not of high importance.**

Another barrier to me finding work was the language, since English is not my first language. I find it difficult to express myself. Another problem

was making up a CV. It is again difficult to translate and use writing skills in a foreign language.

The Life and Work in Britain course gives a background of the history of the UK and, in particular, aspects of Scottish life. It deals with everyday skills including communication with other people, job skills, general things like learning about taxes, presentation skills, telephone skills and legal issues about working.

In doing this course, I became better at completing job applications, preparing a CV and communicating confidently with fellow students,

colleagues, customers and potential employees. I particularly enjoyed learning telephone skills. Learning about different job roles has given me better knowledge of what jobs I could pursue in the future.

I believe this course is beneficial for foreign people when they first arrive in this country and apply for jobs. It explains the basics – how to look for a job, how the tax system works, etc – and the feedback from tutors has helped me to prepare for my future working life in Britain.

**Aberdeen College  
Life and Work in Britain**

# Employability Skills and 'New Scots'

Students were asked to complete questionnaires at the start and end of the course, take part in interviews and produce portfolios of work completed during the course. This multi-dimensional approach to collecting data was designed to increase the reliability of the evidence.

## Outcomes

**The criteria for success were deemed to be:**

- increased confidence ratings in the repeated questionnaires;
- improvement in English language ability;
- any changes in current employment situation;
- general feedback gathered in course evaluation forms;
- an increase in numbers attending the course in coming sessions.

The findings at the end of the intervention showed that each of the criteria listed above had been met, albeit to different degrees.

## Embedding and Disseminating

The class was initially an option for learners and one of the original criteria for success was an increase in take-up. However, such was its success and popularity with students, it has now been incorporated as a core part of the EFL course thus ensuring that all such students will benefit.

## Main Lessons

- The intervention has allowed Aberdeen College to develop a programme for students studying EFL which addresses recognised and documented barriers to employment. Our findings indicate that it has been effective in meeting their needs and helping to address these obstacles.
- The dramatic rise in the migrant worker population over the past year has emphasised the importance of this group of students and the requirement to assess their needs and put in place strategies to address them.
- The intervention was of value to the professional development of the staff involved, opening up a whole new range of contacts and networking opportunities.
- It gave a voice to the students, raising awareness of their experiences and needs.
- It provided the impetus for bringing about change and enhancement to provision.



## FROM REFUGE TO EMPLOYMENT

Val Robertson - North Glasgow College

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### Purposes

To develop learners' "soft skills" for employment alongside improving their proficiency in English.

To develop learners' understanding of the rights and responsibilities of active citizenship in Scotland.

To develop learners' self confidence and self esteem, both in and beyond the classroom, thus improving their prospects for employment or enabling them to access further and higher education.

### Outline

The focus of the intervention was what can be termed "soft skills" which could be elicited and developed by changing the teaching methodology used on the course.

Learners were given the opportunity to use their language skills in productive, process-driven projects which were group rather than individually oriented. These group projects facilitated the development of soft skills such as motivation, responsibility, confidence, self-esteem, learning ability, interaction with others, problem solving, team working, creativity, flexibility, planning and organising. The development of these soft skills was measured using self-evaluation questionnaires, thus recording "distance travelled".

### Intervention Activity

Learners worked together to accomplish set tasks. Learners were presented with a list of tasks (related to International Students Day, ESOL Year Books, Newspaper and Information for New Students) and asked to select one in which they would like to participate. Groups were formed, then learners worked through a series of planning and organising stages which built towards the achievement of the

task selected. Running alongside this, learners completed self-evaluation questionnaires focusing on soft skills development and were given one-to-one guidance on their performance by the tutor. Teaching staff acted as facilitators throughout the tasks.

### Outcomes

- Learners had the opportunity to use their English language skills in a variety of practical and purposeful situations.
- Development of soft skills was recorded.
- Increase in achievement and retention was recorded (albeit based on a small sample over one session only. Further evidence would be required to validate this).

### Embedding and Disseminating

This intervention is sustainable. It is planned to incorporate similar group activities this session and to build on its success by exploring the possibility of adapting the paperwork for the activities so that the students can gain SQA awards in Working with Others and/or Problem Solving.

Dissemination has taken place both in-college and across the sector. In college, presentations have been given at course team and faculty meetings and also at a cross-college "Good Practice" event. Sector-wide, a presentation and workshop was given at an SFEU/HMle event "Designing and Delivering Inclusive Learning" (8 May 2006).

### Main Lessons

The development of soft skills is possible within the curriculum by redesigning the learning experience. Boosting these skills provides students with the confidence to move on to the next stage in their journey to employability.

## KHATUN'S STORY

**Khatun is an asylum seeker from Sudan. She completed the equivalent of a secondary level education in her own country but had no formal educational qualifications and had never been in employment.**

After spending a few years studying part-time at a local women's centre, this was the first year she had the courage to attend college. She was a hard-working member of the class who always knew the right answer but was very quiet and lacked confidence in her own ability.

As part of the intervention activity, Khatun worked with three other students to produce a yearbook for another class. It was interesting to see her develop from being quiet and lacking in confidence to assuming leadership of the group and overseeing the work of two other groups, producing yearbooks for other classes. She made sure everyone met the deadlines, she liaised with teaching staff, she worked with the photographer (a student on another course) and she managed to persuade reluctant students to complete tasks.

Because she took an active role, she gained confidence in using English, both spoken and written. She also improved her IT skills and enjoyed this aspect so much that she applied and was accepted for a part-time NQ Computing course.

In her own words: *"I am glad that I have achieved something in a foreign country because in my country I haven't done things like this."*

**North Glasgow College  
From Refuge to Employment**

## MOTIVATE ME AND I'LL SURELY SUCCEED

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### Purpose

To explore whether a move towards a more learner-centred methodology coupled with additional support can improve the motivation, achievement and retention of Modern Apprenticeship SVQ Level 3 Health and Social Care learners.

### Outline

These learners combine study within the college setting with learning and assessment in their own working environment. Addressing the retraining and up-skilling needs of lifelong learners in work presents new challenges for colleges in terms of the ways in which in-college and in-work learning and assessment are presented. This intervention sought to address some of these challenges.

### Intervention Activity

The intervention focused on five key areas:

1. Recruitment and Selection Process: introduction of a more robust recruitment, induction and initial assessment process and improved information for candidates.
2. Induction/training programme: a focus on induction and training which reflect current issues, debates, standards, legislation and values in the Health and Social Care sector.
3. Staff facilitation: a move away from the traditional transmission approach to a learner/facilitator partnership model.
4. Learning environment: modern facilities, improved access to computer technology and mobile telephonic systems in college and in learners' work environments.
5. Active learning approaches: including self-assessment, peer assessment and group projects.



Learner reflection and evaluation was carried out continuously.

### Outcomes

- Improved retention.
- Improved learner satisfaction.
- Indicators of soft skills improvement.
- New staff skills, knowledge and learning and teaching approaches.
- Redesigned programme.

### Embedding and Disseminating

- New approaches will be continued and further developed.
- Lessons learned are being shared with colleagues.

### Main Lessons

- Learners need access to appropriate facilities, technology and staff support at times that reflect their flexible working patterns.
- Learners respond positively when lecturers demonstrate enthusiasm and up-to-date experience.
- Focusing learning around topics and issues of current relevance to the industry helps learners to sustain motivation.

## PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT – THE FOCUS FOR BUSINESS SUCCESS

Pamela Cumming - Cardonald College

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### Purpose

To introduce the development of Personal Skills and raised awareness of Business Acumen as a means of enhancing the employability of Diploma in Stress Management students.

### Outline

Learners completing this programme have already achieved the Diploma in Holistic Therapies and are very competent in the technical therapy skills required to set up in business. However, they may lack the personal skills and qualities required for successful self-employment and may also lack the necessary business skills.

### This intervention aimed to:

- 1 Develop a broad range of skills and qualities necessary for successful self-employment, such as:
  - self-confidence;
  - self-esteem;
  - motivation;
  - time management;
  - goal setting.



## CAROLINE'S STORY

**In all honesty, although I found the Life Coaching classes inspiring at first, after a while, I lost interest.**

However, as is usually the case once out there amongst it, I became aware that I had learned much more from the life coach than I had realised and what he had taught us did become very useful. As I say to my clients, "Here are the tools, now go out and use them", and really, that is what the life coach did for us. The only problem was we did not realise it at the time. So, sorry, Coach, and thanks.

I have now left college and am doing very well in the areas of work in which I studied for the past two years. I am frequently told that I am inspirational, motivational and good to be around; also that I surround both myself and those around me with positivity and feelings of wanting to get out there and conquer.

I was recently asked the question, "Did you find that you got where you are today because of the Life



Coaching sessions?" My immediate response was, "Certainly not. I would have got here anyway because I am a fighter and a survivor." After having said these words, I stood back and gave the question further thought and immediately retracted them.

The life coaching sessions were a definite contributing factor in helping me get to where I am today. However, like many good things that happen in life, we automatically think we did it by ourselves. It is only when we are asked the question

that we realise the people who helped us get to where we are. The continued positive and motivational language used by the coach was inspirational and instilled huge self-belief. By the end of a session with the life coach, I was ready to go out there and conquer the world, and even that was not big enough.

I am good at what I do. I feel good about myself because I help others to feel good about themselves. My self belief and motivation have grown enormously and I think this is due in no small part to the inspiration and enthusiasm of the life coach.

Life coaching can motivate, inspire, challenge and encourage people to rise to life's challenges, learn how to deal with them and rely on their own intuition and self belief.

I am glad I have had the opportunity to meet and work with someone so enthusiastic and motivational.

**Cardonald College  
Personal Development- the  
Focus for Business Success**

- 2 Offer learners the opportunity to develop a business plan and the business skills sought by banks and small business support organisations.

## Intervention Activity

- The views of Holistic Therapy employers were sought on the requirements for successful self-employment.
- Learners used a number of self-evaluation and progress-tracking tools based on Emotional Competence concepts.
- A Life Coach worked with learners over the course of seven weeks, building confidence in self-awareness, self-esteem, assertiveness and goal-setting and introducing the idea of change.
- Learners kept a Reflective Log over the course of the year and noted their personal experiences and levels of confidence in working with clients.
- Learners undertook a Business Enterprise unit which included the preparation of a business plan.
- Learners prepared a presentation, a letter of introduction, a business card and an elevator speech, all of which can be used to promote their business.
- Learners had a final two sessions with the Life Coach after completion of the business plan, focusing on setting up their business, marketing themselves and promoting their product.

## Outcomes

- There has been a progressively marked improvement in learners' perceptions of their Emotional Competence.
- This is matched by tutor observations that the learners involved in this intervention have progressed with confidence and ability and have surpassed the levels of competence reached by the previous five cohorts.
- The use of the Wheel of Life tool and the Emotional Competence questionnaire together gave a useful measure of soft skills.

## Embedding and Disseminating

- The principles of Emotional Competence are applicable across vocational areas.
- A Life Coaching input incurs a cost but could perhaps be delivered using student induction programme funding.
- Lessons learned are being shared with colleagues.

## Main Lessons

- It is important to 'front load' input and introduce intensive confidence-building, self-awareness and goal-setting activity early in the programme.
- Those presenting this type of programme must themselves display Emotional Competence.
- The measures used in this study could be used with any group to improve overall Emotional Competence and employability skills.
- Self-evaluation is inevitably influenced by personal circumstances; a disruptive home event may result in a downgrading in the results.
- The 'Hawthorne Effect' may have had a positive effect; learners knew they were involved in a Focus on Learning 2 intervention and that they would be evaluating certain skills at the beginning, middle and end of their programme. They may therefore have been more ready to engage in activities designed to develop these skills.

## MANAGING ME

Helen Bacon - Dumfries & Galloway College

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### Purpose

Many students in courses such as Hospitality, Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy find it difficult to remember to bring all the necessary equipment and clothing to participate in the practical classes. The purpose of this intervention was to identify ways to help learners become self-reliant and to be on time, appropriately dressed and equipped and so be able to take part in the learning process.

### Outline

Historically, learners who are not properly dressed or equipped are not able to participate in the practical classes. This causes problems in terms of progression and group cohesion. This intervention explored three approaches aimed at building learner awareness and confidence in preparing for college and ultimately preparing for work.

### Intended outcomes:

Using the Hackney Employability Wheel<sup>1</sup>, the following outcomes were identified as being desirable:

- creating a good first impression – appearance;
- being reliable;
- planning and organising – turning up with appropriate uniform, kit;

- adapting effectively to changing situations in the workplace;
- managing their time so that they maintain a life balance and arrive at work prepared, alert and with a willing attitude;
- team working.

### Intervention Activity

- All learners participated in developing a Code of Conduct.
- All learners completed evaluation questionnaires at various stages.
- Lecturers completed observation forms for each learner.
- Classroom based workshops, including Welcome Host, to emphasise the importance of customer service.
- Embedded soft skills development in practical classes (kitchen, restaurant, salon) and tutorials.
- All learners completed Lifestyle Logbooks  
Groups completed either Self-Evaluation sheets or Buddy Evaluation Sheets.

## TABITHA'S STORY

**Tabitha joined the SVQ 2/Int 2 Hairdressing course from school in August 2005 and successfully completed her course in June 2006.**

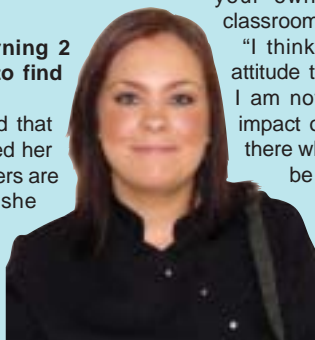
Over the summer Tabitha looked for a job and was successful in finding two part time jobs, one in Homebase and the other in a hairdressing salon in Dumfries. She was offered a third which she did not take up.

She progressed to the SVQ2/ Higher Hairdressing course in August 2006.

**How Focus on Learning 2 has helped Tabitha to find and keep jobs.**

Tabitha has identified that the last year has helped her to realise what employers are looking for and how she has changed.

"I now know the importance of being prepared for the day



ahead; whether this is the interview itself, by looking smart, taking copies of certificates and arriving a few minutes early, or every day in the job. As I have to rely on buses, I have to plan ahead to be on time for work.

"The importance of leaving your problems behind you and putting a smile on your face has been an important learning point for me this year. No clients or colleagues want to see a miserable face. It is hard to do sometimes, but you cannot bring your own problems into the classroom or salon.

"I think I have changed my attitude towards being reliable. I am now more aware of the impact on others of not being there when needed. This may be when someone is off and the client is taken by someone else who has to work harder. This has happened to me and

I know how it feels so would not do it to other people.

"Employers are looking for someone who will work hard. I held down two jobs over the summer, sometimes working an eleven and a half hour day. I have just picked up my new hair extension kit costing £200 which I saved and paid for by myself. So I know now I can work a long day and hold down two part time jobs if I really want something.

"I think I have more confidence now, especially when dealing with customers. I have to work with a wide range of clients in the college salon; including clients with learning or mobility issues, college staff, older people, other students, general public. I have learnt how to deal more comfortably with people who have a range of hair types and scalp conditions."

**Dumfries & Galloway College  
Managing Me**

# Employment in Practice

## Outcomes

- Learners developed an *appreciation* of soft skills as well as practical skills
- Learners demonstrated improvement in soft skills whilst completing practical classes and *liked* being more independent and better prepared.

## Embedding and Disseminating

- A series of 3 x 2 hour sessions will be developed based on a Welcome Host programme. This incorporates the key aspects that staff felt were most useful and will be delivered as and when lecturers feel it is relevant for their tutorial groups.
- The Code of Conduct activity will be retained as will the observation and self evaluation documents, amended according to the new Code of Conduct. The course team will discuss use and agree approaches to ensure consistency.
- Dissemination events to other groups of staff through staff development programme.

## Main Lessons

- Short course delivery such as Welcome Host appears less effective than the experiential learning process within a realistic work environment.
- It is very important to be aware of group dynamics. The Hospitality group were resistant to completing buddy observations. It transpired that they had established their own mechanism of peer support. Their class representative contacted them every Monday to remind them what they had to bring in and they all met up to reflect on the previous week. In effect they had established their own system.
- Because lecturers were seen to attribute value to soft skills and behaviours (by completing observation sheets), learners were encouraged to value these skills and behaviours more.

<sup>1</sup>Balgobin, E, Hutton, C, Rees G (2004) *Unqualified Success: Life Skills, Work Skills*, London, Hackney Training and Employment Network



## CITIZENSHIP: MAKING READY FOR EMPLOYMENT

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### Purpose

To investigate whether the inclusion of citizenship activities in a NC Computing programme of study:

- helps learners to gain the soft skills of responsibility and team work that will enhance their employability;
- raises their achievement on the programme.

### Outline

The NC Computing programme tends to attract a higher than average proportion of young male learners who need help to develop self-awareness and a sense of how their actions and words impact upon themselves and others. Past experience suggested that the inclusion of non-vocational activities in the programme helped learners to acquire these qualities and the team was anxious to explore this further.

The design of the NC Computing programme was amended to include a series of citizenship activities culminating in a group project involving the wider community. Learners also undertook the unit *Working with Others* (D01F 11) and participated in reflective focus groups.

### Intervention Activity

Cross-team approach

#### Programme of activities including:

- Citizenship Week and Citizenship Year activities;
- incorporation of *Working with Others* unit;
- series of half-day visits to community organisations;
- team building activities at local outdoor centre;
- two study trips (one in UK, one to Paris);
- fundraising events for local charity;
- final group project: building a website for a voluntary agency.

#### And:

- pre and post intervention SWOT analyses;
- student focus groups (pre, mid and post intervention);
- employer liaison;
- staff feedback.

### Outcomes

- Indicators of improved team working skills and self-awareness.
- More sense of group identity and increased inter-member support and tolerance.
- Enhanced CVs.
- Improved links with local employers.
- Improved relations with local community organisations.

- New learning and teaching materials.
- New staff understandings of employability and citizenship.
- New team approaches to learning and teaching.

### Embedding and Disseminating

- Consideration to be given to bringing the project activity forward so that benefits can carry over into other subjects and relationships.
- Student feedback to be used to inform shape of future activities.
- Learning and teaching materials will be amended as necessary and used again.
- A strong team has been forged for further activity.
- Lessons learned are being shared with colleagues.

### Main Lessons

- A whole team approach by staff is essential.
- Some learners may resist activities which are perceived to be irrelevant to vocational studies.
- Perseverance is required to constantly highlight the purposes and benefits.
- Some activities will be more successful than others, depending on the make-up of the group.
- A flexible approach is required, reflecting sensitivity to the age, experience and gender-balance of the group.
- Giving learners more exposure to the world outside college – employers and the community – is valued by all concerned.
- A mixed age range can work well, giving learners different perspectives of employability needs.
- There may be some discomfiture for staff; familiar ways of relating to learners may not be appropriate, requiring willingness to adapt, to try a new approach.
- This intervention represents only the start of a process, one which will hopefully develop in learners as they move on.

## IMPROVING SKILLS FOR LEARNING AND WORK

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### Purpose

To investigate if intensive guidance support and development activities for a specific class group can improve employability skills.

### Outline

Access to Higher Education classes have in the past suffered from low retention and poor progression rates often for reasons unconnected to academic ability. This intervention was designed to provide a more comprehensive support system for Access students over the academic year. In particular, it aimed to encourage students:

- to change their ways of thinking about themselves;
- to better understand the education system and their place within it;
- to explore various solutions to potential problems related to their study lives;
- to learn how to learn;
- to learn to believe that a successful academic career and subsequent employment was both possible and desirable for them;
- to explore career options and career planning.

### Intervention Activity

The course was redesigned; the range and number of units were reduced and a Preparation for Higher Education slot was developed as the 'carrier' for all of the intervention activity. This included SWAP and UCAS activities, personal development activities and individual guidance and support. Learners also undertook two Core Skills Intermediate 2 units in this slot – Working with Others and Problem Solving.

### The year's 'Intervention Timetable' was planned at the start and included:

- non-negotiable Access activities (e.g. visits from speakers, UCAS deadlines, profiling activities, etc);
- a programme of intervention specific development activities designed to develop transferable skills attractive to both Higher Education institutions and employers;
- a programme of events, visits and activities designed to enhance the student experience.

### Outcomes

- Every student who took part in the final structured interview reported that they now considered themselves to be 'more employable' than they had been at the start of the course.
- Student Profiles were the best the college had seen for many years. No fewer than six students achieved an 'AAA' grading and only three of 21 did not achieve the grades they needed to progress to their first choice of university.
- It is also significant that the three students who did not achieve their desired grades were able to absorb this information remarkably well and showed resilience and adaptability in planning an alternative progression route.
- High levels of student satisfaction were reported with the Preparation for Higher Education experience.
- There was a measurable improvement in students' own perceptions of their Core Skills in Communication, IT, Working with Others and Problem Solving.
- Students reported significant improvement in general confidence levels and belief in their own capabilities and chances of success at university.
- Even those students who chose not to progress to university felt that the programme provided them with a valuable chance to evaluate their skills and abilities and to examine what they wanted to do with their lives in the future.
- There was a real sense of cohesion in the group. The many activities which focused on teamwork and group activity led to a higher than usual level of mutual support and interaction.

### Embedding and Disseminating

- The programme, with a few adjustments, will be part of the Access course again next year.
- Lessons learned are being shared with colleagues.

### Main Lessons

- Input such as the Preparation for Higher Education class must be seen as an integral part of the course and not as an 'add-on'.
- Careful planning at the beginning of the year is necessary but repays the effort many times over.
- Imaginative ways can be found to resource such initiatives. In this case, SUMs from the two Core Skills units delivered as part of the Preparation for Higher Education class funded the provision.
- Students in any college and on any type of course will always thrive and benefit from a programme which is designed around them and which emphasises them as individuals – with unique needs, ideas, experiences and talents.

## MIND MATTERS

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### Purpose

To help learners free themselves from long-established negative attitudes and behaviours that inhibit their chances of gaining and sustaining employment.

### Outline

The ESF funded 'Building Inclusion' project aims to facilitate entry to new employment opportunities in the construction industry in Glasgow. Many participants display attitudes and barriers to learning during their training that inhibit their chances of long-term employment. This intervention used techniques based on Cognitive Behavioural Psychology to empower learners and tutors to effect changes in attitudes and behaviours.

### Intervention Activity

The first stage of the intervention focused on developing the understanding of key staff members of Mind Matters concepts and training them to use the programme's toolkit.

In the second stage of the intervention, students took part in an induction programme to identify educational and psychological needs and to encourage attitudinal change. This took the form of an Introduction to Adventure Training as a means to develop life skills in individual/team behaviour and leadership skills.

### Subsequent programme content included:

- introduction to student support bodies;
- identification of numeracy and literacy needs;
- introduction to theory of Cognitive Skills/ Attitudinal Development;
- introduction to Stress Management.

### Progress will be indicated by means of:

- pre and post intervention learner questionnaire and interview;
- peer evaluation;
- pre and post intervention staff questionnaire;
- pre and post intervention line manager questionnaire.

Aftercare support will be provided for the intervention group.

### Outcomes

- There has been some improvement in retention and completion rates.
- Learner responses in the post intervention attitudinal questionnaire indicated progress towards more positive attitudes, suggesting that even an introduction to the basics of Cognitive Skills can effect an improvement in attitude.



- It seems that deeper understanding and practice of group psychology, training skills and coaching methods can assist the more challenging client groups to achieve more from their experience of education and open up more life opportunities for them.

### Embedding and Disseminating

- Further staff training will take place in the techniques employed in this intervention.
- Intervention activity will be continued and developed - approximately 160 new learners will be introduced to the Mind Matters concepts in the next stage of the 'Building Inclusion' project.
- Lessons learned are being shared with colleagues.

### Main Lessons

- This type of activity requires committed and dedicated staff.
- Success depends on being able to provide learners with appropriate materials that help them to identify their own skills and qualities and to work towards making changes in their outlook.
- More time is required to assess the longer-term impact of the intervention in terms of positive and sustained learner outcomes.

### Quotes

"How I think affects how I feel about myself.  
How I feel about myself affects how I behave."

## WORKING WITH EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

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### Purpose

To develop the employability skills of a group of young adults who have additional support needs by adopting common teaching approaches and devising a curriculum which would allow them to learn emotional intelligence.

### Outline

#### To achieve the above by:

- providing a series of seminars/workshops for staff to raise awareness and understanding of Emotional Intelligence and in particular how it impacts on employability;
- providing a rich curriculum of activity-based workshops to support the development of employability skills of students by challenging them, breaking down comfort zones and raising motivation, confidence and self-esteem.

### Intervention Activity

- A series of twilight workshops for staff on Emotional Intelligence and its impact on employability of students.
- Following the staff development tutors were asked to adopt the following approaches / methods when teaching the focus group; a common conflict resolution approach completion of an Employability Checklist to give positive statements on students' performance to set SMART targets.
- A calendar of workshops to engage and challenge students was devised. These were specifically targeted during January, February and May which are the months identified as the low points in the academic year when retention rates are affected. These workshops were designed to maintain interest and motivate students from the start to the end of term. The workshops were provided by external organisations and internal Drama staff. The content covered teamwork, problem solving, motivation, fun, awareness of emotions and expression of emotions, self-regulation, empathy, communication skills and conflict resolution.
- Work placement talks which were delivered by students at the conclusion of the intervention. Each student was required to deliver a solo talk, in a one to one situation, to first year students.
- An Employability Skills Profile was completed by students to assess the four areas of Emotional Intelligence. This provided evidence of distance travelled for each student.
- An Employability Skills Checklist was completed by tutors each time they taught the group.
- A Personal Development Plan and Log Book were completed by students with guidance and support from tutors.
- A Placement Provider Evaluation Form was completed by employers at the mid point and end of work placements.
- Evaluation forms were completed by students after each workshop to identify areas being developed and skills learned.
- The college Personal Learning and Support Plans were used to provide both student and tutor comment and evaluation.



## Outcomes

The staff development sessions on Emotional Intelligence resulted in the following outcomes:

- increased awareness of personal problems experienced by students and increased understanding of the barriers to learning which they experience;
- tutors encouraging and supporting students to solve their own problems;
- students/tutor empathy increased and tutors more patient;
- the common approach to conflict resolution which tutors adopted was unanimously found to be a very effective way for resolving difficulties;
- the Employability Checklist was considered to be repetitive and therefore although it provided valuable information it was gradually phased out;
- smart targets were felt to be an area which merits further staff development and collaboration;
- the Personal Development Plan proved difficult to initiate because of constraints of time;
- the Log Book was redesigned to take cognisance of the 'Emotional Element' of the intervention but it was generally found that students preferred to discuss rather than write about what they were learning;
- the Drama Workshops were well received by the more mature students, however the younger students were somewhat self-conscious and inhibited by role-play;
- the Team Building days were a resounding success and allowed students to bond and develop team skills. It was felt by staff and students that all the objectives had been met on this programme and this was an excellent strategy;
- the Effective Communication workshop was much appreciated and students felt that they learned good coping strategies;
- the Work Placement Talks were very successful and evidenced the growth in competence and maturity of the students.

## Embedding and Dissemination

- Team building days are sustainable and can be embedded in the curriculum as they are funded through bursaries.
- The Employability Skills Profile provided a base line from which to measure distance travelled but requires further development to ensure it is convincing and reliable.
- It is recommended that the staff development on Emotional Intelligence is rolled out to all staff so that it can be embedded in the curriculum.

## Main Lessons

- This intervention was considered to be a success by all who participated in it.
- By providing opportunities for students to learn Emotional Intelligence all of the students of the focus group have improved to varying degrees in self-regulation, empathy, self-awareness and motivation.
- There is ample evidence from the findings to recommend taking forward the intervention in the future and there is also strong evidence to support the involvement of external agencies which provided a fresh approach and some novel methods.

## LEARNING FOR LIFE

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### Purpose

To enhance employability skills in FE non-advanced client groups using Collaborative and Experiential Learning Techniques, in particular a method known as Critical Skills Programme (CSP). The focus of the intervention was on the enhancement of personal qualities such as respect, reliability and willingness to learn which are believed to underpin the core skills and softer skills necessary to gain and keep employment.

### Outline

#### To achieve the above by:

- exploring the use of CSP to create a collaborative learning community and to facilitate experiential learning, problem-based learning and results-driven learning;
- embedding delivery of the CSP approach within the delivery of the NQ course Information Systems Intermediate 2;
- having two members of staff (trained in CSP) deliver staff development to others involved with the learners taking part in the intervention activity;
- timetabling to prioritise the delivery of the four units which comprise the course by the same member of staff;

- employing an action research approach throughout the intervention;
- providing identified accommodation for groups taking part in the intervention activity.

### Intervention Activity

A range of CSP techniques was employed in the delivery of the vocational curriculum.

#### Challenges were created to enable learners to:

- develop understanding through performance;
- demonstrate their developing skills and attitudes;
- attend to the processes of learning and social interaction;
- see the 'big picture' that makes the work worth doing.

## WILLIAM'S STORY

**William had a difficult childhood, both socially and educationally. With minimal family support, he had found it very difficult to conform to the requirements of mainstream schooling in Paisley. As a result he found himself, aged 16, living alone in hostel accommodation attached to an alternative education provider in the Paisley area. Despite concerns about his ability to see the course through and his lack of formal qualifications, William was awarded a place on the NC Computing Intermediate 2 programme in June 2005.**

Our intervention focused on delivering the existing curriculum by means of the Critical Skills Programme. This turned out to be exactly what had been lacking in William's previous school experiences.

No longer was he required to sit quietly for hours at a time; instead he was encouraged to communicate with his classmates as part of his learning experience. Minimal traditional 'chalk and talk' delivery

meant that when he did have to listen carefully, he could manage this easily because it was always for a very short space of time. Whilst working collaboratively with others, he gradually realised that he was just as competent as his classmates and therefore just the same as everyone else. This was a revelation to him. For so long, he had perceived himself as 'second best'.

His self esteem continued to grow steadily during the year. Towards the end of the course, one member of staff organised 5-a-side football events for the boys. William thoroughly enjoyed these events, playing a full part. On one occasion, the warden of his hostel called the college to find out if William was telling lies about these football nights: seemingly during the five years he had been in care, he had always refused to get involved in activities organised by staff members.

By the end of the course, William had attained eight out of a possible 18 credits on the programme - not a success in terms of our usual performance indicators. However,

for William, this was a wonderful achievement. He had managed to stay with us for the duration of the course, his time keeping had improved enormously, he now had confidence to interact casually with young people his own age, he contributed greatly to all course activities and generally our Course Team believed that he had gained a great deal from his year with us.

Sadly, due to never-ending family upheaval, he decided to move up to Aberdeen over the summer. However, I am pleased to be able to say that he has since started a Horticulture course at college there and is settled in a small flat on his own. We were even more delighted to be contacted by the college because he had used our name as a reference. He would not have been able to do this 12 months previously. He is currently looking for part-time work to supplement income and once again we will be happy to give him a reference.

**Reid Kerr College  
Learning for Life**

## Specific tools of CSP were used to develop skills and attitudes, for example:

- brainstorming and distillation - to develop creativity and critical thinking;
- quality conversation and discussion – to encourage contributions of ideas;
- quality audience – to develop effective listening;
- Full Value Contract agreed to establish a safe learning environment;
- in addition learners were encouraged to reflect on their learning and engage in collaborative, complex problem-solving activities that link to the real world.

## The action research approach employed utilised the following sources of evidence:

- questionnaire to establish student perception of key employability skills;
- soft-skills self-assessment administered before and after the intervention;
- employer questionnaire on employability;
- recording of staff experiences.

## Outcomes

- Retention has improved.
- There is a marked increase in the number of job reference requests submitted by learners, although no reliable figures from last year are available for comparison.
- The lecturers trained in CSP have found that classroom dynamics have been turned around positively by employing the techniques and tools of this programme – a much more relaxed learning environment has been established.
- Staff generally have felt less harassed and, although a lot of preparation is required, once the learning challenges have been set, the learners are working much harder and with more focus.
- Feedback has become much more meaningful and constructive; learners are more able to deal with suggestions for improvements and less defensive about their efforts.
- Theory subjects delivered via CSP have been more successful than practical classes which is a departure from previous years when practical classes were more successful.



## Embedding and Disseminating

- The increased success of theory classes delivered via CSP over practical classes has led to a revision of the course programme.
- Two more staff will undergo full CSP training.
- CSP will be delivered within at least one HN course, other non-advanced courses and at least one Outreach group within the department.

## Main Lessons

- Learners generally enjoy the entire CSP experience and report benefits.
- Support from the department is crucial in terms of timetabling and resources.
- By prioritising the use of a classroom for learners taking part in the intervention, the maintenance of materials and resources for staff and learners was much improved.



## MOTIVATED TO SUCCEED

Sharon Giannasi - Reid Kerr

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### Purpose

To establish if visualisation techniques combined with goal setting workshops can enhance student motivation and promote student achievement.

### Outline

To achieve the above by designing an intervention for NQ Digital Design students centred around:

- a student diary;
- visualisation and goal setting workshops;
- new methods of delivery adopted by lecturers based on in-house staff development on pro-active and student-centred learning;
- input from employers and past students.

### The data was captured through:

- pre and post student questionnaires on soft skills;
- a student questionnaire asking them to reflect on group participation;
- a student diary containing a record of the workshops and a summary page recording milestones in the programme;
- a White Book which recorded a snapshot of student progress, attendance, timekeeping, to compare data against previous year;
- figures recording early retention, course retention and attainment over three years;
- student feedback;
- lecturer feedback;
- employability skills progression.

### Intervention Activity

Students participated in the following activities:

- workshops on visualisation techniques to promote self-esteem;
- goal setting workshop on setting a map to reach your goals;
- workshop on fixed IQ versus untapped potential;
- a range of other activities which included promoting positive thinking, active learning, awareness of motivational rhythms, identifying problems and reviewing progress;
- completing a diary which recorded the above activities and reflected on what had been learned/achieved;
- completing pre and post intervention questionnaires on soft skills.

### Staff participated in:

- delivery of workshops;
- adopting new methods of delivery based on in-house staff development on the use of pro-active and student-centred learning;
- creating and adapting the materials used during the intervention.

## Outcomes

### Post course success ratio:

- 76% accepted onto Higher Education level;
- 5.5% left to go into meaningful employment;
- 5.5% withdrew due to ill health;
- 5.5% did not complete owing to studying away from home;
- 5.5% completed the course, passed several units but did not pass the full programme.

### Data showed that there was:

- 100% early student retention;
  - 88% student retention;
  - 70% student achievement.
- 
- All of these figures showed an improvement on the previous two years.
  - Pre and post questionnaire results in almost all cases reflected a positive improvement within the categories.
  - Visualisation techniques combined with goal setting has been shown to positively affect the student experience and contribute to enhanced student motivation.
  - Visualisation techniques combined with goal setting has been shown to positively promote student achievement.

## Embedding and Dissemination

- The Student Diary has proved to be a very valuable tool and will be used again in an amended form.
- The visualisation techniques can be used prior to students undertaking new tasks as a way of building their confidence.
- The group photo included in the Diary will continue to be used as an ice-breaker.
- Learner styles and employability skills will be integrated into the curriculum delivery.
- Visiting lecturers and past students will continue to be invited to give presentations to students.
- The theory behind the intervention is being rolled out to other students who participate in school/college programmes.
- HN students will have a new Personal Development Plan Portfolio containing workshops on employability skills and self-assessment and be encouraged to reflect on and map employability skills progress to self-improvement.
- Each lecturing team member was given a task within the intervention that involved learning new skills - eg statistics, Web CT, research - and these skills were disseminated to the Art and Design section.



## Main Lessons

- Students need to be encouraged to be pro-active participants in the learning process.
- If students are taught less they can learn more. The step back from teaching is often very difficult for the lecturer but it enables students to be more pro-active in their own learning.
- Facilitating learning should be the focus of the lessons, not the delivery of teaching.
- Visiting speakers help to focus students on their career prospects.
- The lecturers have been encouraged to be reflective practitioners through challenging their modes of delivery.

## DEVELOPING A COLLEGE STRATEGY FOR EMPLOYMENT

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### Purpose

To investigate if there are key strategies a college can employ to improve employability in its learners.

### Outline

Most research into employability in education has focused on graduate employment and the Higher Education sector and there is little to help staff struggling to understand employability in the particular context of further education. This investigation used a case study approach to explore employability within one college and had four aims:

- 1 to define 'employability' in the Cardonald College context;
- 2 to investigate what the college currently provides in programmes and activities to improve learners' employability;
- 3 to evaluate the usefulness and impact of these measures;
- 4 to evaluate the key messages report how they might inform future strategy.

### Activity

- A literature review was carried out to gain a deeper and wider understanding of the concept of employability and to determine a definition which would be pertinent to the college and its milieu.
- A study of employability skills in programmes and activities within Cardonald College was carried out .
- Impact of current provision was evaluated and areas for improvement identified.
- Findings from Cardonald College Focus on Learning 2 interventions were considered and incorporated into a report for senior management which aims to inform strategy.

### Findings

- Work experience and employer contacts are seen as crucial factors in preparing students for work but present challenges.
- Employer links tend to be stronger where learners are being prepared for specific vocational employment and less strong where learners are being prepared for more general employment.

# What does Employability mean?

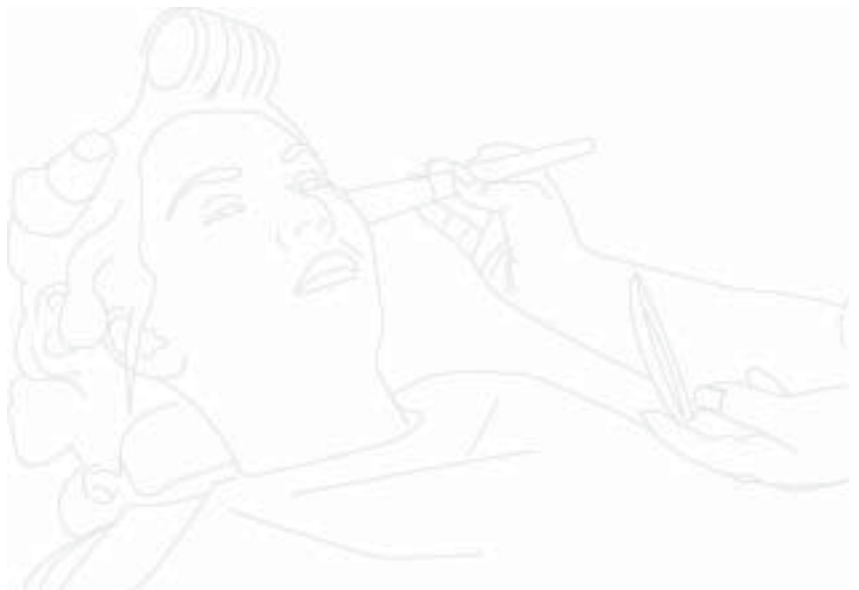
- Initiatives which may be said to incorporate employability skills development are often carried out without prior research and are generally reported as successful even though there is little hard evidence to support this.
- Employability is affected by personal circumstances and external factors (such as the labour market) as well as by what happens in college.
- The seven Focus on Learning 2 interventions carried out in Cardonald College approached the development of employability skills in a systematic way and have provided valuable insights.

## Embedding and Disseminating

- A number of recommendations regarding a college strategy on employability have been made.
- The findings of Focus on Learning 2 interventions are being shared as widely as possible.

## Main Messages

- The absence of a whole college policy leads to well-meaning but ad hoc responses to perceived employability needs, which means that there is no accountability for results or realistic measurement of impact.
- Lack of tools for measurement of soft skills, poor employer engagement, the impact of personal circumstances and labour market conditions emerge as key challenges in improving employability for students.
- Staff are committed to giving learners the best possible chance of gaining and sustaining employment and are innovative and creative in designing activities, but these activities may arise as a result of staff *perceptions* of what can be done without recourse to research or clear evidence.
- Management support is a crucial factor in encouraging new initiatives.
- There is a need to raise staff and learner awareness of what employability means in a broad sense. A successful strategy must help learners to develop resilience and alternative strategies rather than simply help them gain skills for employment.
- Focus on Learning 2 findings have the potential to make a significant contribution to the development of college employability strategies.
- Further research on ways to engage with employers and the role of work-based learning is needed.



## EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS: WHAT ARE THEY AND CAN THEY BE TAUGHT?

Lesley Smith - Cardonald College

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### Purpose

To compare learner and employer perspectives with regard to the relative importance of various employability skills and their views on how best they can be learned.

### Outline

Employers sometimes tell us that candidates, particularly young people, seem to lack the soft skills they consider important. The question then arises, do learners realise the importance of these soft skills?

This intervention sought to establish broad areas of agreement or disagreement between learners and employers so as to inform measures for raising awareness and skills levels.

### Intervention Activity

- 149 learners from three vocational areas (Construction, Computing/Business Studies and Fashion & Design) completed a questionnaire which explored their views on the relative importance of various employability skills and the best ways of learning them. Each class group also participated in a group discussion to further explore the issues raised.
- 24 employers completed a similar questionnaire.
- Broad areas of agreement/disagreement were identified.

### Outcomes

The relatively small number of employers responding makes it difficult to draw general conclusions. However, in this instance, there was broad agreement between learners and employers that some skills and qualities are important or very important. There were some areas of disagreement between learners from different vocational areas and between learners and employers.

### For learners, the three most important employability skills were:

- having the right attitude to work;
- good timekeeping;
- willingness to learn new things.

### For employers, they were:

- having the right attitude to work;
- learning from experience (not repeating the same mistake);
- honesty.

Learners do not always fully understand what is meant by 'employability skills' and have differing views about the best context for learning them.

### Embedding and Disseminating

Informed by other Focus on Learning 2 interventions, different approaches to the delivery of employability skills in these vocational areas will be piloted.

### Main Lessons

- Although most students are aware of the importance of employability skills, perspectives vary according to age and vocational area.
- Learners respond positively when lecturers relate employability skills to their own industry experience but this needs to be recent, and this has implications for continuing professional development.

All six partner colleges are extending and building upon their work in Focus on Learning 2: Steps to Employment. Dissemination activity is being used to transfer the good practice that they have identified to the remainder of Scotland's Colleges.

This is a complex and challenging area of work. The lessons learned have varied according to a range of factors. These have included the specific needs of groups of learners; the context within which the learning has taken place; and the vocational area on which the learning has focused.

The broad scope of FoL2 and the methodology employed ensured that partners were able to work together, share the lessons learned and generate a deeper understanding of a specific area of learning. The experience gained through the project also highlighted several general areas where strategic and cultural changes in colleges could lead to a sustained improvement in practice.

### **Sharing the challenge more effectively with employers**

Colleges have a clear responsibility for helping learners to develop appropriate employability skills, attitudes and behaviours. However, these soft skills are also learned and developed in specific work environments.

While many productive partnerships are already in place, there is a need to develop further practical and efficient lines of communication and coordination between colleges and employers. Achieving the right balance of responsibility will help develop and maintain an appropriately skilled workforce.

### **Qualifications/Certification – Measuring Success**

While policymakers have recognised the importance of employability skills and the concept of 'distance travelled', this presents challenges to a qualifications system which relies mainly on forms of certification that are not able to capture the full range of skills employers now say they require.

There is a need to address the issue of how we measure improvement and judge success in relation to employability skills, both internally within colleges and through external quality review procedures. HMLe may wish to reflect on how the work carried out in this project can inform the recognition of success in terms of both achievement and attainment.

### **Further and deeper collaboration between colleges is needed around the development of innovative learning and teaching approaches founded on action research findings.**

The six partner colleges have produced significant findings and resources which will be shared with other colleges. However, in many ways, this is just the start of improving effectiveness in the delivery of employability skills and there is scope for continuing collaboration and development based on action research findings not just in this area, but in other areas of strategic importance.

Participants are convinced of the benefits of such collaborative work and there is a need to develop sustainable models for continuing and extending such activity in the college sector.

### **The development of an action research community in Scotland's Colleges should be sustained**

Every day in Scotland's Colleges, staff are reflecting on learner progress and adjusting their practice to improve it. The funding available to this project made it possible to do this in a more systematic way. Time for reflection, staff development activities and research support allowed novice and more experienced researchers to improve their action research skills and to develop deeper understandings.

Focus on Learning and Focus on Learning 2 have made a significant contribution to the development of a research community which can carry out longer-term, qualitative research *on* colleges, *in* colleges. The sector needs to develop a culture which supports and encourages this community, not least because of increasing degree-level activity.

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**Focus on Learning 2:**

Steps to Employment is supported by the SFC's Strategic Fund and involves SFEU and six partner colleges



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