>lsc

Leading learning and skills

Delivering Employment-Related Skills to People who are Out of Work

A Good Practice Guide for FE Colleges

March 2010

Of interest to all in the further education sector

INTRODUCTION

This Good Practice Guide is a result of research conducted in summer 2009 among a selection of FE colleges. The colleges that participated in the research were involved in a range of programmes aimed at encouraging colleges to support those who are out of work to gain sustainable employment:

- National Voluntary Training Pilot (NVTP)
- The Training Offer for those unemployed for six months (Six Month Offer)
- Adult Learner Responsive Pilot (ALR Pilot)
- Sector Employability Toolkits Pilot (SET Pilot)

This Good Practice Guide will be of interest to those within FE colleges responsible for responding to and implementing similar programmes.

The Guide covers six key areas:

1. Planning and setting up provision
2. Identifying courses that will help learners move into employment
3. Increasing referrals from JCP and directly recruiting learners
4. Maximising conversions from referral to enrolment and learning
5. Helping students move in to sustainable work and continue learning
6. Monitoring success in learning and work

The research was conducted while many of the colleges interviewed were still at relatively early stages of delivery (most had established processes and partnerships but only a few had delivered courses to significant numbers of learners). As such this Good Practice Guide should be seen as containing examples of good practice *so far* – further good practice is expected to emerge when delivery is at a more advanced stage and more colleges are involved with the offers.

1 – PLANNING AND SETTING UP PROVISION

Colleges need to prepare thoroughly to make sure their offer will be able to successfully deliver employment-related skills to those out of work. Key things to consider are:

Labour Market Information

- ✪ Consider the impact of the current economic climate and find out how this has affected the type and number of vacancies in your area.

- ✪ Look to Jobcentre Plus (JCP) for the latest details on local vacancies and recruitment activity.

- ✪ See which other organisations in your area can provide supplementary information; try Regional Development Agencies, Local Authorities, Employment and Skills Boards, Regional Strategic Partnerships and Business Link. You may also be able to use statistical information in the public domain – look at the websites for NOMIS (part of the Office for National Statistics) or the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion (CESI).

- ✪ Find out if the college already holds information through its Employer Responsive team, and make the most of the knowledge existing contacts may have. Can you contact neighbouring colleges to pool labour market information?

- ✪ Keep abreast of any changes in the local labour market – a source of up-to-date information is necessary as the traditional picture, or older statistics, may no longer be relevant.

Working with JCP

- ✪ Ensure you have thorough initial discussions with each JCP office in your area to gain insight into their customer types and needs – what are their profiles? What are their qualification levels and skill sets? What numbers and patterns of referrals can you expect?

- ✪ Ask if college staff can attend internal JCP meetings as well as 'back to work' sessions (in some areas these are mandatory events for all those unemployed for six months to build awareness of JCP customers and internal procedures.

- ✪ Establish a communications strategy - set up regular meetings with JCP to keep the flow of information on the courses running, customer progress and changes to processes up-to-date.

- ✪ Identify one main managerial level contact at each JCP and any other key advisers, but also ensure you can access the client-facing advisers frequently as they will be the people selling your courses. In particular target the specialist advisers who deal directly with those who have been unemployed for six months or more.

- ✪ Third party provision managers within JCP are also useful contacts; ensure they are keep up-to-date with the provision you are offering.

Staff issues

- ✪ Be prepared for additional administration, liaison, marketing and support work. Consider taking on new staff or adapting existing positions. Utilise the expertise of individuals experienced in supporting unemployed learners to manage day to day tasks and administration where possible. This may include staff with experience and knowledge of working with JCP or experience in running other externally funded projects.

- ✪ Having established a central contact at JCP, the college should have their own central contact who is available on a daily basis to deal directly with JCP queries and paperwork. This person could co-ordinate the college's own marketing of the offer too - an 'Unemployment Champion' to drive programmes and work with JCP forwards.

Other colleges

- ✪ Seek meetings with other nearby colleges to find out what types of courses they are offering, the popularity of courses and to learn how they deal with local JCPs in terms of administrative / paperwork requirements and processes. Co-ordinating paperwork or meetings with other colleges would reduce the burden on JCPs; this may encourage JCPs to consider colleges other than those they are already familiar with.

- ✪ Find out if there is any scope to share resources or re-direct referrals to other colleges, check there is no unnecessary overlap in provision in your area which may lead to difficulties for one or both colleges in filling places.

2 – IDENTIFYING COURSES THAT WILL HELP LEARNERS MOVE IN TO EMPLOYMENT

The courses that the college offers needs to strike a balance between the needs of local employers and the abilities and employment aims of learners:

Employers

- ✪ Who is best placed to meet with local employers to find out about their recruitment situation and needs?

- ✪ Does the college have existing contacts or expertise in dealing with local employers that you can utilise?

- ✪ What major employers are there in the local area? Don't forget that SMEs are often able to offer flexibility in recruitment practices.

- ✪ Will JCP be able to provide new contacts?

Learners

- ✪ Think about how you can you tailor your training to meet the needs of the range of JCP customers. Those who:
  - o Have been out of learning for quite some time
  - o Have been unemployed frequently, and / or have low confidence or motivation
  - o Are highly skilled, professionals, who have been recently made redundant from a long term job and may have out of date qualifications.

- ✪ The college offer may include short 'quick fix' courses or to help build confidence to carry on to more learning alongside the longer, more traditional vocational courses.

- ✪ Conduct an introductory interview with those referred by JCP to explore their background and support needs; make sure you cover their work history, skills, qualifications and employment aims (both short and longer term) as well as discussing the needs of the local labour market with them.

- ✪ Build up a programme to suit the individual that addresses their needs and will significantly improve their chances of getting a sustainable job.

3 – INCREASING REFERRALS FROM JCP AND DIRECTLY RECRUITING LEARNERS

Being highly proactive is the best way to increase the number of referrals from JCP. Colleges can also recruit potential learners directly through marketing activities:

Be proactive with JCP

- ✪ Speak directly with JCP advisers to promote awareness of your colleges offer and ensure understanding of the specific courses available. A pre-arranged face to face approach works best here as many advisers have limited time for ad hoc emails and telephone calls. Keep advisers updated about which courses need extra referrals in order to start running as this creates a sense of urgency.

- ✪ Produce handouts for advisers detailing contact(s) at the college alongside a brief outline of the referral process and the procedure for paperwork. Also include flyers for them to pass on to customers such as with information about the courses, support available, maps and transport advice.

- ✪ Discuss with JCP whether they have the resources to have a presence at the college to help with recruitment and the referral process or if they would be willing for college staff to come to JCP offices to market the courses and speak to customers directly.

- ✪ Ensure that key partners such as JCP, **nextstep,** the Careers Advice Service and community advice centres are kept supplied with the latest information and promotional material.

Plan marketing to attract potential learners directly

- ✪ Consider whether building a wider 'word of mouth' and / or running a more targeted campaign could be beneficial in your area. The former could include elements such as advertising on the college website, local press or radio; putting posters or flyers in public places such as libraries, doctors' surgeries and supermarkets. Maybe hold a stall at local job fairs or open days.

- ✪ A more targeted approach could involve asking JCP to send letters to eligible customers or to identify the wards in your area where unemployment is highest so you can focus activities. Think about other links you could use to access potential learners - perhaps relevant voluntary organisations or charities which support the out of work or employers that have made redundancies - ask if you can give a talk or distribute marketing materials via them.

- ✪ Ensure any promotional material appeals to JCP customers by highlighting success stories for those in similar situations through case studies and reassuring individuals about course entry requirements, eligibility and the nature of the courses. Include details of the destinations of previous cohorts, the percentage getting a job, continuing in training, progressing at work.

4 – MAXIMISING CONVERSIONS FROM REFERRAL TO ENROLMENT AND LEARNING

Drop-out levels at all stages are a risk so employ measures that will help improve conversion rates from referral to successful course completion:

Referral from JCP process

- ✪ Arrange 'drop-in' or open days to which JCP can refer customers without needing to speak to the college to arrange a time / date for each individual.

- ✪ Give careful consideration to course start dates to ensure they tie in with the likely pattern of referrals. Close contact with JCP should help this run smoothly.

- ✪ Consider ringing customers referred by JCP the day before their initial interview to check they are intending to come along, and make them feel welcome. Call those who do not attend after the first or second time to arrange another date, inform them of the next open day or identify any barriers that may have prevented them from attending.

Flexibility

- ✪ A quick turnaround from advertising / promoting to starting the course will help minimise drop-outs before the course start.

- ✪ Flexible delivery e.g. roll-on roll-off and remote learning should enable a quicker turnaround as large group numbers are not required.

- ✪ Also consider caring commitments and the implications of these, including potential support arrangements that could be put in place.

Individual support

- ✪ The initial interview is key to agreeing with the customer a tailored, personalised programme that will support successful transition into learning and provide a clear route into sustained employment.

- ✪ If a skills assessment is likely to be too daunting for the customer at this stage, consider delaying this a little until the learner has confidence in the process.

- ✪ Also think about the time of day interviews are held, a quieter time with not too many other students around may be best. Similarly, having classrooms near to smaller 'break out' areas might help reduce concerns (especially for some older learners) about being surrounded by younger school leavers.

- ✪ Your college may wish to review any sign posting support or advice services available, including help with study costs, housing problems and other financial and personal support, perhaps for drug or alcohol problems, health or mental health issues to ensure these meet the needs of JCP customers as sensitively as possible. Linking effectively to appropriate help should encourage retention.

5 – HELPING STUDENTS MOVE IN TO SUSTAINABLE WORK AND CONTINUE LEARNING

The college's offer should be focussed on helping learners achieve a lasting employment outcome. Making this the focus of the offer will have implications for how provision is delivered and the additional support that learners might need. Actions for consideration include:

Employability training and skills

- ✪ Offering help in the context of the vocational area with employment-related skills such as how to tailor CVs and interview techniques effectively as part of the learning experience. This would build on any generic training already supplied by JCP or its providers.

- ✪ Arranging for local employers in the sector to input in to this training or offer insight into their requirements for new employees.

- ✪ Maintaining contact and support once the learner has completed their course if they do not get a job to keep them up-to-date with their chosen sector and perhaps repeat softer skills training.

Learner support

- ✪ Appointing a specialist adviser / support worker to personally help each learner through the course and into employment. This contact could be through weekly meetings to discuss attendance, progress made and job searches.

- ✪ Providing guidance and support in finding and applying for vacancies. Consider training staff to be able to help learners identify and apply for positions in their chosen sector.

- ✪ Holding an exit interview to review progress, and to agree a future action plan with learners around their options.

Continued learning

- ✪ Actively planning to use Train to Gain or Apprenticeship routes to ensure learners that have entered employment continue to progress.

- ✪ Offering flexible options for continued learning: flexi-time study, evening classes, online facilities and outreach centres will encourage learners to fit their study around a new job.

Employers

- ✪ Approaching local businesses and/or voluntary organisations to promote voluntary or paid work placements for learners as part of the course programme or after completion.

- ✪ Asking employers to offer learners an interview after completion of their new programme.

- ✪ Informing employers that these learners should be eligible for Train to Gain funding and, having recently been trained have the added advantage of being up-to-date in sector specific skills and knowledge such as health and safety and IT .

- ✪ Working with employers to identify potential barriers to entering work.

6 – MONITORING SUCCESS IN LEARNING AND WORK

The success of the programmes will largely be monitored by the numbers able to enter sustainable employment. Being able to conclusively report on this should build commitment internally, from JCP and provide valuable information to target potential learners.

✪ Can the college's monitoring of employment outcomes be carried out through existing management information systems? Monitoring employment outcomes needs to done as thoroughly as qualifications gained or learning outcomes, so make sure staff and systems are in place.

✪ Be clear from the start how you will identify sustainable work and check the guidelines on how long after completing the course you can still 'count' an ex-learner entering work as a successful outcome – rules may vary depending on the programme.

✪ Have a member of staff to check on learners' progress after leaving through a combination of follow-up telephone calls and destination surveys. Keeping in touch by offering support even after the course has finished may encourage responses.