Department for Education

College Collaboration Fund (CCF)

Insight Report:

Learner Support Workstream

March 2022

Contents

Introduction

The College Collaboration Fund (CCF)

The College Collaboration Fund (CCF) is a national programme of competitive grant funding that in its first year (2020-21), due to the COVID-19 pandemic, provided support to colleges during one of the most challenging times in modern history.

The first year's total £5.4 million grant funding has supported 20 projects involving 71 FE colleges across England to address shared quality improvement challenges. These colleges have developed new ways of working and produced a range of resources and learning that has been shared with the rest of the FE and wider education sector. The CCF builds on the learning from previous programmes, including the Strategic College Improvement Fund (SCIF)

The CCF focussed on delivering quality improvement against the three priority themes of:

- leadership and governance.

- financial and resource management.

- quality of education.

What does this report cover?

Throughout the first round of the CCF, the Department for Education provided programme coordination and project support across the CCF's three workstreams:

- Development of new digital content for vocational subject(s).

- Development of approaches and digital content for learner support.

- Development of approaches to improve workforce and organisational capacity and capability for digital delivery.

The purpose of this report is to share the insights, learning and good practice from those projects who have focused on developing approaches and digital content for learner support. Information on the projects in other workstreams can be found here.

Who is this report for?

- College Principals, CEOs and Vice Principals.

- FE senior leadership teams.

- College practitioners.

- FE and other education sector stakeholder organisations.

3

Learner Support and Safeguarding

CCF Workstream objectives

To support the FE sector by developing approaches to support learner mental health and wellbeing; support learners transitioning back into education settings; encourage vulnerable learners at risk of disengaging to return to learning and participate fully in education; and prepare learners for the second or third year of their study programmes.

Overview

Each of the CCF projects brought together a group of FE colleges and other partners to:

- reflect on their existing approaches to learner support.
- develop and deliver new ways of working and new resources to support learners.

Outputs

The CCF has published a summary of each project and a list of the new learner support resources they have produced. These resources are free for use by all FE learners and staff and can be found here.

Colleges Involved

The colleges that had a focus around learner support included:

Lead Colleges	Partner Colleges

Key Outcomes and Impacts

Over **45,000** learners have benefitted from new digital mental health and wellbeing resources

782 person to person counselling sessions have been delivered

Over **1000** learners attended virtual transition events

Digital tutorial resources created to support Level 2 and high vulnerability learners

Development of college digital learning platforms that support learner progress and progression

"*I feel safer experiencing my own difficult emotions. I have been increasingly able to feel more positive emotions and my depression feels like it has lifted. The practical advice on how to sit with my emotions has been extremely beneficial.*" Learner, Weston College

"*The project has provided significant secondary benefits for Shrewsbury College Group. The opportunity to build a strong relationship with peers working at the same level of management and responsibility for safeguarding, has provided unexpected positive benefits which will support ongoing quality improvement.*" CCF Project Lead, Newcastle and Stafford College Group

"*Not only have the projects created an impressive bank of resources through which the sector can support learners, but it has also established and cemented the benefits and value of collaboration in the sector.*" Frances Wadsworth, Deputy FE Commissioner

"*You have created such a great* [virtual work experience] *programme that is going to help me and many other people in the future. I really hope that this programme can continue and provide people the skills and knowledge that will help them in their career.*" Learner, Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College

Key Insights and Top Tips

1 — Ensuring you have the right amount of **time, resources and budget** to deliver your plans for new learner support is essential.

2 — Right from the start plan how you will **evaluate the impact** of your work and make sure you are **gathering feedback from learners.**

3 — It is important to **research and get input from learners** to identify what their support needs are.

Reach out to other sectors for expertise and help e.g. health, local authority, schools.

Make sure you **get the buy-in of teachers and learners.**

4 — Make sure that you have the **IT infrastructure and skills needed** to produce and deliver any new digital resources you produce.

Ensure new resources are **flexible to the needs of learners** and can be **easily adapted by others staff.**

5 — Check that any new resources are **accessible for all learners.**

Be aware that **learners may prefer 'on demand' digital content** which allows them to access it when and where they like.

6 — You must **communicate regularly with all those involved** in the work but just sending emails is not enough.

Regular in person or virtual face-to-face meetings are essential to keep the momentum going.

7 — Make sure that early on you **test any new resources with learners, teachers and other professionals**

Case Study 1

Lead College: Weston College

Partner college: Gateshead College

Other partner: Somerset Counselling Centre

Total cost of project: £509,757

Written by: Ben Knocks, Assistant Principal, Weston College

Case Study 1

Preparation

What was the problem you were trying to address?

Our aim was to address the impact of COVID-19 on both learners and staff. In particular, this related to their heightened anxiety around the risks associated with returning to college and being able to adapt to remote and blended learning. This had the potential to have a significant impact on the retention and achievement of learners.

Who was involved?

We approached Gateshead College as a partner because of their track record of successful delivery on a number initiatives. We also partnered with the following organisations who had the skills, knowledge and expertise we needed:

- The Somerset Counselling Centre (SCC): a high-quality local charity known throughout the region. The SCC has been accredited by BACP (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy) since 2003 and its values very much aligned to what we wanted to achieve through this CCF project.

- Benjigraphics: a local design agency that was brought in to design and set up the Let's Chat website.

- Somerset Film: An educational charity and film production company that were used to create the evaluation film and some of the case studies to illustrate the impact of our work.

What did you set out to achieve and why this was important?

We aimed to address the immediate and urgent need to develop a new and comprehensive approach to supporting FE learner and staff mental health and resilience.

With COVID-19 we had an unprecedented demand on mental health and wellbeing services in our colleges. We recognised that it was critical to develop a new and comprehensive whole institution approach to supporting mental health and resilience. By building our capability to identify, support and signpost effectively we wanted to achieve a direct impact on improving learner outcomes.

We aimed to complement, enhance and extend the existing student support and wellbeing initiatives of our colleges. We also aimed for our work to be disseminated to and adopted by other colleges, allowing others to integrate this into their existing mental health support strategies. Our work had the potential to drive quality improvement of this support across FE.

Case Study 1

Implementation

How did you implement your programme of work?

'Let's Chat' is a comprehensive package of well-being support with elements that were specifically designed to be accessed remotely by learners and staff. We brought together the expertise of practitioners from education, mental health and General Practice to develop it as an holistic approach to learner and staff wellbeing support. Let's Chat was delivered through three workstreams:

- **Therapy:** This provided person-to-person remote counselling that aimed to improve learner and staff mental health and wellbeing. There was also an enhanced level of specialist in-person support for SEND learners.

- **Workforce Development:** This provided direct support to address the immediate support needs of staff. Alongside this, it also provided CPD to up-skill staff so in the future they could better recognise and manage their own emotional wellbeing and support that of learners and their colleagues.

- **Thematic workshops and resources:** To ensure no-one was left behind at a time of remote learning and working, we developed a website to support individuals which was accessible remotely and on-demand. Working with our expert partners and staff within both colleges, a comprehensive series of engaging digital content was produced.

How did you plan to measure success?

The impact of counselling was measured through a scoring system that assessed an individual's emotional state whilst the effectiveness of the support for SEND learners drew on existing information, including attendance and retention data.

Quantitative and qualitative feedback from staff was used to evaluate the effectiveness of the workforce support and CPD. This was triangulated against other data including learner surveys which helped us to see what impact this had on how well learners felt supported at college.

We used data on the numbers accessing the on-demand thematic workshops and other digital resources, along with quantitative and qualitative user feedback, to evaluate their impact.

What challenges did you encounter?

The main challenge we had to address was a cultural one of changing how mental health and wellbeing is perceived and understood. This also relates to the terminology, where mental wellbeing is sometimes conflated with questions of 'mental health' and illness.

Review

What was the impact of your work?

One of the key successes was creating the 'Let's Chat' website as a means of empowering learners and staff. We believe we have enabled individuals to take control of their own wellbeing by developing personal understanding, skills and strategies. This lessens their dependency on others and ultimately enables them to be more independent and resilient.

Our highly effective CPD programme ensured staff are now better equipped with the tools to meet the changing and diverse needs of the FE population. Staff will be able to use these skills through out the rest of their career.

We are confident that we achieved what we set out to do, which was to address the real and immediate need for increased mental health and wellbeing support for our learners, our staff and the rest of the FE community.

Beyond this, we hope that Let's Chat can act as a catalyst for change that helps other colleges to meet the challenge of supporting the mental health and wellbeing of their learners and staff.

The work delivered:
- **Let's Chat** website supporting positive wellbeing and promoting understanding of mental health and including 40 **e-toolkits** for staff and learners.
- 782 one-to-one remote counselling sessions for learners.
- 193 SEND learners benefitted from specialist support including 1,731 support sessions provided by specialist practitioners
- Innovative approaches to staff wellbeing delivered
- Over 800 staff upskilled on mental health and wellbeing including 100 receiving Mental Health First Aid certification.

Reflections and next steps

What are your reflections on what did and didn't work, and the steps you are taking to spread the learning and impact of your work wider?

It is clear that staff prefer accessing mental health and wellbeing support from external organisations and the importance of working in partnership with these to effectively respond to the challenge of mental health.

There can be a tendency to assume that if a college has an effective welfare, pastoral service and mental health advisers that any learner or staff member will be comfortable, confident and have appropriate support. This however, isn't always the case - there needs to be a broader culture change in the whole college. Our work has been key in changing the culture of both colleges and further strengthening how they put mental health front and centre and ensure staff and learners are given the time to develop positive wellbeing.

We would make the following recommendations to other colleges in how they approach mental health and wellbeing support:

- Partnering with external organisations and sharing their expertise and learning will influence the college's wider practice and add value to new resources.
- Provide learners and staff with the necessary tools and time so that they feel empowered to tackle mental health
- Let's Chat has proved the impact that colleges can gain from investing in staff CPD, as well shifting the culture by creating a sustainable wellbeing workforce development model
- The creation of on-demand content that allows individuals to broach issues at the time and place that is best for them and will support colleges in breaking down barriers associated with mental health and wellbeing

How are you planning on sustaining your work and the collaborative relationships?

Both colleges are committed to working with the specialist support of Somerset Counselling Centre in continuing to evolve the Let's Chat brand. We will focus on further developing the website to continue disseminating the learning to the whole of the FE sector at a time when it is most needed.

As the project lead, Weston College is fully committed to the mental health and wellbeing of learners and staff, having been the first college to sign the Association of Colleges Mental Health and Wellbeing Charter.

We will continue to provide staff and learners with the skills and confidence to manage their own wellbeing and support others. Our approach will see new initiatives continue to be launched including Let's Chat mentors and a new whole college wellbeing strategy 'Wellbeing@Weston' led by the Principal & CEO.
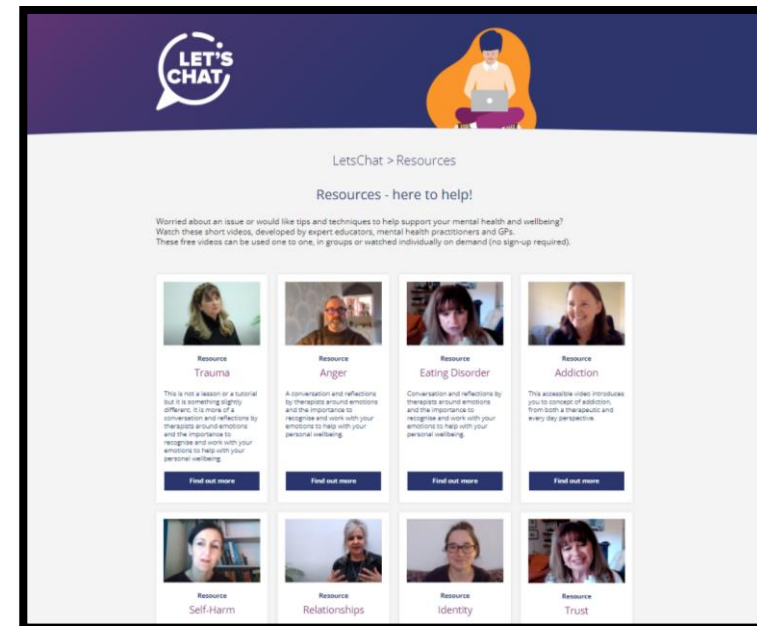
Case Study 2

Lead College: Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College (EHWL)

Partner colleges: West Thames College, Harrow College and Uxbridge College, Windsor Forest College Group, Brooklands College and Heathrow Airport (third party)

Total cost of project: £567,500

Written by: David Warnes, Deputy Principal, EHWL

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Case Study 2

Preparation

What was the problem you were trying to address?

We aimed to address key challenges facing the colleges when switching to online delivery or remote learning, and support learners to further their careers in the local economy.

Who was involved?

Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College took the role of lead college, working along with West Thames College, Harrow College and Uxbridge College, Windsor Forest College Group and Brooklands College. Collectively we also worked with Heathrow Airport as the lead employer partner.

What did you set out to achieve and why was this important?

- To produce new digital content and resources to support a **virtual work experience** programme. Building the relationships with Heathrow Airport and its wider supply chain and infrastructure partners such as HS2 and Transport for London.

- To develop young peoples' essential skills through a **targeted coaching and mentoring programme** aimed specifically at vulnerable groups, NEETs and the digitally disadvantaged.

- To build **teachers technical industry skills** that would support the use of technology in teaching and learning, and prepare learners fully for the world of work.

How did you plan to measure success?

Staff from all levels of the organisation were involved in the planning of the work and we set ourselves with clear objectives, milestones and targets. The plan was agreed by our Senior Leadership Team and a well managed, clear internal reporting structure made sure there was effective and robust scrutiny of the project. This included reporting to both SLT and the college's equality and diversity committee.

Progress was measured using information including retention and attendance data, baseline assessment surveys, and learner and staff feedback.

Implementation

How did you implement the programme of work?

We held monthly steering group meetings with senior members of all five colleges and Heathrow Airport to review progress. Sub-groups were also set up for each of the workstreams and these met on a monthly or weekly basis to oversee delivery.

We tailored our approach based for each of the workstreams:

- **Virtual work experience (VWEX) programme:** From the planning, designing and delivery, there was close collaboration between the colleges, Heathrow Airport, Springpod and employers. In total ten employers participated, designing the programme's content and activities, including hosting live webinars. The programme content was designed around the Skills Builder framework and aligned to the Gatsby Benchmarks. Elements included: exploring personal strengths for employment, identifying workplace behaviours, personal brand, and interviews for success. The focus was on new technologies within five sectors: business, construction, engineering, marketing and IT.

- **Coaching and mentoring programme:** The colleges' identified a number of coaches and mentors across curriculum areas. They then carried out baseline assessments to identify learners that would most benefit from targeted support. Some colleges focused on priority groups including black Caribbean, those leaving care and construction students. The programme supported and extended the work in this area across all colleges at a time when strengthening the mental health and resilience of their learners was extremely important.

- **Technical industry skills for teachers:** We arranged for college staff to attend Accenture's Future Fit 'train the trainer' programme. The programme was designed around eight specific workshops on the impact of automation and Artificial Intelligence and what it means to reskill. Staff then went on to train other staff and help embed the Future Fit programme into other curriculum areas.

What challenges did you encounter?

- There were challenges with staff being off due to furlough, changes to some of the staff involved in the work and having to build in additional time to enable employers to sign-off final content. However, these were overcome through clear and regular communication.

- It was a challenge working online to communicate VWEX arrangements to learners, where normally tutors could communicate, prepare and support learners face to face in the classroom for the work experience programme. However, delivery on online enabled learners to enrol onto multiple VWEX programmes and complete additional modules. This highlighted learners interest in other sectors and demonstrated their level of self-motivation.

- With the targeting of mentoring support there was a risk that learners could have felt that they were being singled out based on factors such as their ethnicity. This could of impacted on how mentoring was perceived and the level of engagement. This was addressed through both consideration during planning and the training of the mentors.

- Engaging with 'Team Heathrow' to deliver master classes, work shadowing and developing course content and materials presented challenges. This was due to covid restrictions and working with a number of employers of varying levels of commitment and capacity. This required regular contact and meetings with employers to develop relationships and provide clear communication.

Review

What was the impact of your work?

- 1,411 learners participated in VWEX, exceeding our target of 1,000, and the majority of these were living in the local area.
- 90% of learners and employers found the online VWEX with Heathrow airport businesses a positive experience.
- Over 600 vulnerable learners benefited from coaching and mentoring sessions.
- 80% of learners reported coaching and mentoring has improved their mental health and wellbeing.

- 250 teachers have been upskilled though online resources, improving their knowledge of technical industry skills (logistics, travel, construction) and enabling them to support learners in finding a career within the local economy.

The work delivered:

- Delivery of the **Heathrow Virtual Work Experience (VWEX) programme**, engaging ten major employers in the design of content and activities, and hosting of live webinars and Q&A panels involving Heathrow businesses, professionals and learners

- Delivery of a new **mentoring programme** that has developed new coaches and mentors across all the colleges and curriculum areas.

- Completion of workforce 'Young Minds' training. This includes a **Coaching and Mentoring Toolkit**

- **Technical industry upskilling of teachers** via design and delivery of the new **'Future Fit' train the trainer programme**

- **CPD toolkit** is providing a standardised and consistent approach for teachers to use

- The production of **technical practical videos** to support teachers with remote digital online teaching in a variety of curriculum areas

16

Reflections and next steps

What are your reflections on what did and didn't work, and the steps you are taking to spread the learning and impact of your work wider?

Across the board with virtually every area of society, Covid has presented new and ongoing challenges. It is only through the hard work and commitment of our collaboration that we have been able to develop the programmes and deliver the outcomes that have made our programme such a success.

To have had over a 1,400 learners participating and benefiting from the VWEX programme exceeded our expectations. Also, with over 600 learners benefitting from the coaching and mentoring support, this has helped them to stay in learning and ensure they have a real opportunity of completing and succeeding in their areas of study.

The CCF funding provided a fantastic opportunity to build on the work and relationships that existed previously through the Heathrow Skills Partnership.

How are you planning on sustaining your work and the collaborative relationships?

We will be embedding the learning from this work in to the colleges daily practice, including through:

- coaches passing on their skills by training other college staff and increasing the support we can give to vulnerable learners.

- remote work placement programmes now forming an essential part of a learner's total employability support programme, supplementing on-site placements.

Further Information

Additional information on the CCF

Please visit our gov.uk page: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/college-collaboration-fund-ccf

Contact us

If you have any questions please contact us through our dedicated mailbox:
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