

Stroud College Apprenticeship Project

Project Report

Life Long Learning (Non-traditional routes to HE) Electrical



Advice and Guidance for others conducting similar projects

Guidance on the following topics:

Communication

Communication is key in the management of research/projects of this nature across College departments as well as with key external stake holders, in this case UWE, to which Level 3 students taking part in this project would naturally progress. The internal communication with curriculum, careers advice, along with support departments such as IT from the earliest stages of the project is also vital to its success particularly if new equipment is being introduced as it was in the case of this project.

Sharing Project Responsibilities

Split different aspects of the project between relevant areas within the College for example, all IAG to be completed by Careers advisers, all new course content relating to non-traditional progression routes to be created and signed off by relevant tutors/Managers.

Keeping the profile of Project high

Involve key groups within Colleges for example, Peer Practitioners, the Teaching and Learning Team and Management Teams such as SMT. Through these groups it was possible to maintain the visibility of the project across the College to those who were directly/indirectly involved. This was important as there was a core of staff/learners who had a direct input and there was a much wider element of learners who have benefited as part of the holistic approach of the project in its initial stages.

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PROJECT WRITE UP

Subject areas and levels of learner involved in this project;

1. As the project sample group was extended at the beginning of the project the subjects covered are

Subject	Activity
Complimentary Therapies	Student Voice meeting at outset of project.
Care and Early Years	Student Voice meeting at outset of project awareness raising with some IAG performed with students relating to this project.
Electrical Level 3 Students	Initial feedback from students on aspirations for progression. Trial of various styles of delivery, review of session outline by students.

as follows:

The initial holistic approach supported the project as it provided an opportunity to gather a wider range of feedback and opinions from students which supported the progression of the project. One of the outcomes from this (along with subsequent meetings with LLN) was that the College has set up a Level 4 Foundation degree in Complimentary Therapies. The awareness of the Level 4 Early Years Foundation Degree has been increased demonstrated by an increase in student numbers.

Staff and other participants involved in the Project

The staff involved in the project included teaching, Support staff, IT and Management. The teaching staff were used to create some sample resources and to provide advice on previous year patterns of progression. Support staff (e.g. Careers Advice) made contact with external stakeholders such as UWE and conducted IAG sessions specific to the project concentrating on the Electrical Level 3 students. IT Services then set up project Netbooks and offered training on their use and ongoing support. There was also input from ILT to create a project Moodle area to raise awareness and the project a presence and a virtual home online.

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Teaching and learning context

Description and details of the teaching and learning context for this project (e.g. classroom based, workshop, salon, vocational college based, work based learning, transit, home, college campus, fieldwork, excursions etc)

1. At the initial stages of the project the Level 3 Electrical students who were targeted said that it was too soon for them to consider their option in terms of progression at this stage of the academic year. The project was therefore, amended to have a more holistic start targeting a wider audience (i.e. Complimentary Therapy, Care and General Construction). The extent of this was to ask groups of students commencing on their second Year of Study what aspirations they have to progress in terms of HE. The responses ranged from 'I don't know' to some students being open to the idea but not knowing what was available in terms of HE courses. However, as these were vocationally based students the emphasis of their progression was vocationally based. The impact of this awareness raising was that although Level 3 students progressed to the Foundation Degree (which started in 2006) there was a surge in student numbers in 2009 which may be attributed to the holistic awareness raising at the outset of this project (this is demonstrated below under Key findings outcomes and student feedback).
2. This initial questioning occurred later with the electrical Level 3 students. As part of this we collected previous destination information from Tutors along with some valuable industry knowledge. This indicated that students at this level of study tend to already be in some form of employment within the industry and are financially motivated to complete their course as this will increase their income. With this in mind students tend to progress in terms of their employment rather than consider Further Education options. This sentiment was echoed with the students who generally at the outset did not consider further study as a viable option in line with their motivation. One student expressed an interest in entering FE education as a Tutor and followed this with Advice and Guidance however this did not indicate any sort of pattern.
3. The context of the sessions were therefore, mixed to include traditional classroom set ups, work shops and the IAG facilities of the College. We also made use of the College VLE to gather information and to raise awareness of the project.

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Aims of this Project

Issues experienced by the teachers and learners in this context and what the project hoped to overcome.

1. The overarching aim of the project was to address the need that L3 students on vocational courses have in progressing to higher level courses. The issues related to the generalised nature of the IAG and the absence of formal study skills in sessions which are traditionally practically focused. This was also the concern regarding the link between theory and practically taught sessions as there was a wide distinction between them made more prominent by the need to change from the workshops to an IT Suite (rectified by their use of Netbooks on the workshops). This move from one room to another creates a disruption and serves to widen the gulf between the student's need to complete theory/study skills and their perceived motivation that only the practical work is of value. In general, these issues relate to students wishing to progress from a non-traditional educational path rather than from the more established A level to HND or Degree level.
2. In order to address these issues it was necessary to have a holistic view of the student journey and look at opportunities within their support and the course. These opportunities included the following:
 - Use of additional IT equipment for adapted/specific Study Skills within the work shops (in environments previously considered to hostile for IT equipment)
 - Planned study skills sessions as part of practically taught sessions delivered in a 'Bite Size' delivery plan.
 - Specific IAG for electrical students based on increased research.

All of these aspects were considered and either introduced or amended in order to achieve the aim of the projects.

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What teaching methods were used and what informal or self directed learning took place?

As this was a Pilot Project a number of teaching methods were tested and considered. The assumption at the beginning of the project was that the sessions would be an addition to the curriculum already in place and would add sessions to the course within the tutorial slots. However, we found that tutors were resistant to additional hrs as it would reduce the amount of teaching time available. Also, Employers were uncomfortable in releasing students for an additional activity. For this reason we tested a range of delivery methods.

1. **Self Directed Electronically Based:** We created a Moodle area for students to access with some initial Study skills information along with details about the course. Students appeared keen to have access to this but the Moodle user survey suggested a low level of engagement.
2. **Theory Classroom:** We then moved to creating session outlines and embedded them where possible in classroom theory lessons using the additional access to IT from the project Netbooks. The students were more engaged with this method of 45 minute to 1 hr slots covering some key study skills to support their progression. Students were more engaged with this method as it was more formal but feedback showed that not all students wanted to take part in the project therefore making the session only relevant to a proportion of them. As this was within a typical classroom environment it was not possible to differentiate the learning without one group disturbing the other.
3. **Bite Size Sessions:** After the experiences of the other delivery methods we decided to reduce the timings of the sessions to 20-35 minute bite Size sessions. These took place in the workshops around a large workbench using Netbooks and additional paper based resources. The benefit of this was that students from the group who were not taking part in the Study Skills Project could return to their work around the outer wall of the workshop while the project students took part in the centre. For this group this was the most effective method which may work with other similar groups. As the timings were greatly reduced the students were asked to consider and research different aspects of the study skills in their own time. For example, students were asked to consider different methods of 'Reflective Writing' after the session took place and then they would be questioned on it the following week. This helped to link sessions together but also emphasised the idea that learning is the learners' responsibility. Students in the most part engaged with this method and self directed tasks were kept to research and feedback type activities to limit the amount of written work.

Research methodology - what information we collected and how?

An explanation of how evidence and feedback was collected including the different types of evidence, the various methodologies used and how this took place across the duration of the project.

1. Feedback was collected mainly at the beginning of the project through forum type discussions, the comments from which informed the creation of the IAG and study skills session outlines. From this we moved to a more informal method of feedback at the end of each session and at the end of IAG sessions. Feedback for employers was gained via our Work Based Learning Department to take advantage of the strong relationship they have with industry and with students who are at the college. Staff were also questioned in 1 to 1 sessions to capture their views on the progression of their students in previous years. College wide surveys were also used. Rather than amend the

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survey which needs to remain reasonably generic to the College the students were asked to answer particular questions with the study skills project in mind so that it would be a reflection of what they had learned on the project along with the quality of delivery and whether or not it was the correct course for them. This was a highly effective and efficient method of gathering student opinions as it did not require any additional amendments.

Key findings outcomes and student feedback:

- 1) The Key outcomes of the project shown from the piloted bite size sessions of 15-25 mins demonstrated that a later start time within the academic year is preferred by students and curriculum staff so that students can get used to returning to College before commencing. However, the Advice and Guidance can start at the beginning of the academic year as this raises awareness from the beginning and 'prepares the ground' for the study skills later on.
- 2) The wider participation i.e. the initial holistic approach appeared to take resources from the project which initially was a concern as there was little focus however, the raised awareness has resulted in 50 students visiting the UCAS convention a proportion of those took part in this project. The general impact of the increased awareness was also demonstrated through the recruitment to the Level 4 Early Years Foundation degree by a student who had completed the Colleges own Level 3 courses as demonstrated below:
 - a) Cohort 2 (graduated academic year 2009-2010) - Out of 17 students, 6 had previously done a Level 3 course (either NVQ or Diploma at Stroud)
 - b) Cohort 3 (year 2s for academic year 2010-2011) - Out of 6 students, 3 have previously done a Level 3 course (a further 2 will be joining this cohort as APEL students)
 - c) Cohort 4 (year 1s for academic year 2010-2011) - Out of 12 students, 4 have previously done a Level 3 course

The biggest proportion of students who moved directly from a Level 3 course at the College to the Foundation Degree occurred in 09-10. This correlates with the increase in awareness through student forums and trials of delivery methods at the beginning of 09-10.

- 3) This project also made it possible to link with employers and gain feedback on their views as well as those of students. The College Work force Development and Construction departments were tasked with retrieving feedback from employers regarding this project. Employers commented on their employees taking additional release, their feelings on their employees being encouraged to consider HE as well as how they felt about the addition of Study Skills to the course. Responses to increased time for more study was met with some resistance with one employer saying 'no chance unless it occurred on the day'. However, conversely the employers commented positively to the idea of work being completed with a view to the student progressing to HE at some point. The question of study skills being taught as part of the students' time during the day responses were again mixed, as they didn't mind so long as the students' activities generally met the need of the business.
- 4) The learner feedback was also a very useful tool throughout this project. The responses from the initial Electrical student forums can be summed up as follows:
 - a. 'Continue with present position' (most popular answer)
 - b. 'A teacher' (one student)
 - c. I would consider HE (2 students)

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Although the responses were mixed we continued with the same group. The students have also informally discussed what they plan to do which is in the main to go into self employment considering HE possibly at a later date. This feedback echoes the experience of the teaching staff who said that the majority of the students do go on to be self employed. Two students from this group of eight progressed to a HE level course.

5) The following is Statistical survey information taken from the groups used within the project who were instructed to answer in terms of the work they have completed on this project including some Early Years students who had input at the initial stages of the course:

- 82% of the students taking part on this project agree/strongly agree that their progression goals and aims are set out well.
- 92% of the students agreed/strongly agreed the expected level of work for progression was made clear through the IAG and subsequent lessons.
- 100% of the students asked who took part on the project said that they feel they are on the right course.
- 97% said that they are making good progress.

This demonstrates the effectiveness of the IAG that was amended to include information on the most local HE courses at Stroud, at UWE and Gloucestershire University and the raised awareness. One student originally planning to commence on a Level 2 course changed to a Level 3 to make use of the additional support from the project and said 'I am pleased I have been put into a higher level group'(Construction student Level 3). This demonstrates that this project raised the aspirations of the students involved as well as those indirectly involved. Another student commented as part of a wider college survey that, 'I think the course I am on is good it offers me a lot when I complete the course such as going to do a higher level qualification...' (Electrical Level 3 student) this again demonstrates the raising of aspirations.

6) Generally, the project has raised awareness and provided through the Bite size sessions skills that the electrical students will find useful for future HE study. The biggest impact was the raising of aspirations which were enhanced by the creation and piloting of the Study skills sessions. The College as a result of this project is committed to providing further HE courses in the form of Foundation Degrees in other areas such as business and has introduced a new Complimentary Therapies Foundation degree. These new courses along with the additional Study skills support and lessons learned from this project will ensure that students are prepared for their next level of study.