

Wiltshire College

Preparation for Higher Education

Course Evaluation

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July 2008

Wiltshire College Preparation for Higher Education Course Evaluation

1. Target Setting

	Pilot Course	Target
	2007- 2008	2008- 2009
Recruitment number	9	12
Retention number	9	12
% Retention	100%	100%
Achievement number	9	12
% Achievement	100%	100%
% Success	100%	100%

The majority of candidates were applicants for the Foundation Degree in Early Childhood Studies, many of whom had heard about the *Preparation for H.E. Course* at interview. It is hoped that in 2008-9 a greater mix of candidates will be achieved.

2. Progress on Key Areas

Not applicable- pilot course

3. Scope & Context of Provision

Main Features of the Course

Staff at Wiltshire College and the University of Bath worked together to develop and deliver a part time course to prepare adult learners for Higher Education. The course was set up in response to requests from local employers to provide a bridge between NVQ 3 and similar vocational qualifications and Higher Education for their employees. It was aimed at adult learners with experience and knowledge of a particular area of work who wished to progress to a named Higher Education programme at Wiltshire College.

The course was designed to enable participants to gain academic skills and confidence to ensure success at H.E. level. Funding for a pilot course was gained from the Western Lifelong Learning Network and the University of Bath.

Type of Learners

The course attracted nine adult participants; eight female and one male. Eight learners were White/European and one learner African-Caribbean. None were classified with a physical or learning disability. The eight females were in full time employment, seven in early years and one in a social care setting. The male learner was unemployed.

All learners were in the process of applying for Degree or Foundation Degree courses at Wiltshire College; one applicant for the B. Sc Social work degree, one for the Foundation degree in Computing, and the remaining seven for the Foundation Degree in early Childhood Studies.

Four applicants were self funded, four were funded by their employer, and one was funded by Wilts County Council.

Previous highest qualifications were as follows:

	Number of learners
NVQ 3	4
NVQ 4	1
NNEB (level 3)	2
CACHE (level 3)	1
CLAIT Diploma	1

Mode of Delivery

This 6 session pilot course ran from 16th May to 27th June 2008, and was delivered on Fridays from 9am -1pm at Wiltshire College (Trowbridge).

The course lecturer was also Personal Tutor to all candidates. Individual tutorial support was available after each session until 5pm as requested.

On line support was provided via a communication forum set up in e-study, the college's on-line learning environment. Participants were introduced to this and practised use on day 1 of the course.

Striving for Excellence Values

Ownership is in evidence. The scheme of work was a 'work in progress' that developed considerably from that originally planned, in response to needs identified by both tutor and learners. For example, learners identified anxiety about seminar presentations, so the Tutor revised the last session to comprise individual 'mini-seminars' where learners delivered a brief Power Point presentation on their assignment topic and chaired a brief discussion to follow. This session was particularly valued by learners, as evidenced in course evaluation (see Appendix 1).

Working Together is in evidence. All candidates completed an initial study skills assessment and, with Tutor guidance, drew up an individual 'Action Plan' of improvement in specific study skills. The action plan was revisited weekly and updated.

Identifying Best Practice

1. **Formative assignment** – A mid-way assignment required learners to provide a 500 word summary of an academic article. This 'practice run' was submitted and marked in exactly the same way as a formal assignment, but did not 'count' towards passing the course. This enabled learners to test their skills and receive feedback in a 'safe' way. Learners received next day feedback, enabling them to immediately apply their learning to the final assignment.
2. **Final assignment** – This was composed incrementally over the last 3 weeks of the course, leading up to final submission on the last day of the course. First, learners submitted a draft plan/outline and received tutor feedback on in essay structure and writing style. They then produced a second draft and received feedback on referencing and bibliographies. They worked further on the assignment for final submission on 27th June 08. Educational research suggests that giving constructive task-based feedback is one of the most effective means of ensuring learner success.
3. **e-study Forum** – was set up in session 1, and learners practised sending messages to each other. Educational research suggests that for part time learners, a sense of belonging to an on-line community can significantly aid retention.

Common Inspection Framework Questions

CIF1 How well do Learners achieve?

All nine candidates on the pilot course successfully completed. Final assignments varied in quality from low pass (equivalent to 40% 1st year degree) to excellent. Each candidate received full written feedback on their final assignment. Some submitted work of extremely high quality. One used the mid-term assignment as evidence of writing skills to gain entry onto their Foundation Degree in Early Childhood Studies (evidence: candidate's email). Another candidate used the written feedback on the final assignment as evidence of ability to study at H.E. level, to gain entry onto the B.Sc. Social Work (evidence: candidate's email). Prior to the course, that majority of candidates had achieved NVQ3 as their highest qualification (1 NVQ 4), so there is evidence of considerable distance travelled.

Each candidate will receive a Certificate of success and an individual transcript outlining the topics covered on the course.

Grade 2

CIF 2 How effective are teaching, training & learning?

Individual course evaluation sheets are overwhelmingly positive. There was a noticeable increase in skill levels as the course progressed (Evidence: feedback on mid-term assignments & final assignments).

The combination of a formative mid term assessment and incremental assessment of the final assignment provided rigorous monitoring of learner progress. The group began as low confidence/high anxiety, which can present a huge barrier to learning. There was a tangible increase in learners' confidence over the course (see appendix 1).

The mid term assignment (500 word summary of an article) did not reveal additional learning needs. The final assignment indicated the need for learning support assessment for one candidate. This has been passed onto the Foundation degree tutor in question and the candidate advised of the same in written assignment feedback.

Grade 2

CIF 3 How well do programmes meet the needs & interests of learners?

The course content was 'neutral' in that it concerned study skills rather than subject-specific material. However, stringent efforts were made to locate materials that would apply to the child care, social work and computing backgrounds of learners. The mid-way (500 word) assignment required candidates to summarise an academic article and discuss implications for their practice. The article selected concerned the forthcoming 'Contact Point' national database on children's information, as this was considered contemporary and highly relevant to all three subject areas represented on the course (computing, social work and early childhood studies).

The final 1500 word assignment required candidates to describe a recent development, initiative, change of law or policy relevant to their subject area, and discuss the implications for their work practice. The tutor guided candidates in their selection of topics to ensure relevance and currency. A varied range of subject-specific topics were chosen, from 'Identity Theft' (computing candidate); changes in adult care law (social work candidate); and the Early Years Foundation Stage (early years candidate). These topics will provide sound background knowledge for learners' first year on their chosen foundation degree.

Learners valued the opportunity to study a subject-specific topic in detail, and many commented that the PowerPoint presentation they developed and delivered in session 6 would be used in their workplace to train other staff.

Grade 2

CIF4 How well are learners guided and supported?

Learners identified a high degree of anxiety about the final written assignment. In response to this, the tutor developed a mid-way formative assignment to allow learners to submit a piece of written work and receive feedback, without any effect on their final mark for the course. All candidates submitted the mid way assignment by email and received next-day written feedback.

The final assignment was developed via a series of drafts that learners worked on individually at home, then revised and improved as they received further feedback week by week, via the course content and individual tutorials.

In the group evaluation (Appendix 2) learners commented on room for improvement in careers advice on timing and application to the course, and publicity/marketing material.

Grade 2

CIF5 How effective are leadership & management in raising achievement & supporting all learners?

Internal Monitoring

Individual and group course evaluation completed on 27th June 08 (Appendix 1). Learner evaluation forms discussed with Veronica Francis 4th July 2008. Self-Assessment report compiled and emailed to Sue Jones, (Director of Curriculum) and John Adams (Strategic Director of H. E.) 7th July 2008.

Course Evaluation report emailed to Ruth Waring 7th July 2008 (see below).

External monitoring

Course Tutor met with Ruth Waring, University of Bath, Progression Coordinator, (Western Vocational Lifelong Learning network) on 24th June 2008 to discuss course evaluation. Course tutor gained permission from all learners for Ruth to undertake a follow-up evaluation when learners are 1-2 months into their Foundation degree courses.

Library staff were extremely supportive in providing computing facilities and help with research during individual sessions. Reprographics staff were highly supportive and provided a highly efficient service.

Grade 2

Effectiveness of Provision

Key Strengths

- High quality and regular feedback which facilitated learner improvement and 100% success rate.
- Supportive and committed individual tutoring aiding retention and success
- A safe and nurturing learning environment was established in which learners felt able to share their anxieties and overcome them
- e-study forum aids a sense of group belonging & aids retention
- Highly relevant content which was used in practical ways to secure candidates' progression to the H.E. course of their choice.

Key Areas for Improvement

- General college induction was rated less highly and drew more negative comments.
- Library induction session was not well received.
- Insufficient time for reflection in course
- General publicity materials are adequate and consistent with Wiltshire college requirements, but are not as lively or engaging as those used for similar courses elsewhere.
- Insufficient internal and external marketing of the course

Capacity to Improve

1. General induction & library session will be reviewed with a view to shortening session & leaving in only the essentials. (Action: LS)
2. Further 'reflection' time to be built into course. (Action: LS to explore potential for increased use of individual Action Plans for reflection within session time).
3. Improved publicity material with a view to producing livelier and more engaging material (Action: Liaise with Ruth Waring re other Colleges' publicity material & with marketing).
4. Wider marketing outside Wiltshire College to increase numbers (Action: Engage with marketing & local stakeholders e.g. Wiltshire County Council).
5. Wider marketing inside Wiltshire College. Action: Engage with all Foundation Degree Programme Managers, (Computing, Media, Social Work & Early Years) to achieve a greater mix of candidates
6. The course is proving successful as a bridge to a named Degree but in 2008- 2009 the aim is to achieve university credits (Action: continued liaison at strategic level).

Appendix 1

Individual Evaluations

Individual evaluation sheets were completed anonymously. Learners were asked to grade each session 1-5 as below, and include individual comment on each session.

Session 1 Introduction to the Course

Score	Number of Learners (total 9)
5 Very useful	x 3
4 Useful	x 4
3 OK	
2 Not very useful	
1 Not at all useful	x 1
Not present for session	x 1

Positives	Negatives
<Tutor> was very welcoming	Library session seemed very long
Informative & at a good speed, giving us time to digest	Lot of paperwork to complete (time consuming)
Good chance to meet others in the same boat	Library induction wasn't the best- very hurried
Good idea of course expectations	It was a lot of information to receive all at once
Meeting other candidates	Library talk an hour
Hopes & fears exercise- made me feel more comfortable with our feelings being same &/or similar & shared	Intro to signpost – needn't bother! How to use the computer and the 'find the answers' sheet a waste of time- we do that sort of thing with the internet anyway
Finding our way around	
Good ice-breaker (intro & hopes & fears exercise)	
Very good from start- told what would be included & then carried it out	
Useful & instructive	
All intro's were fully explained and well presented to us	
Introductions exercise- fine	
e-study good if we need extra/back-up help	

Session 2 Assessment of Study Skills, Developing Reading Skills

Score **Number of Learners (total 9)**

5 Very useful x 5
4 Useful x 3
3 OK x 1
2 Not very useful
1 Not at all useful

Positives	Negatives
Learnt so much & realised what my individual skills were	Time to summarise piece of literature could have been longer – felt a bit under pressure; probably down to the way I study, like quiet & having time. When we were summarising <Tutor> did talk through when we were trying to concentrate- they were relevant points but I found this difficult.
Again found this session useful	I evaluated my own reading speed and it could have been better
Good to find out own 'multiple intelligence' to aid you through study.	
Learning different reading styles/methods (skim, scan etc	
Interesting to find out intelligence type	
Reading strategies very useful	
Interesting to see results of self-assessments	
Interesting & helpful	
Study skills self assessment gave an accurate result	
Able to learn all the different reading strategies, assess my own reading speed	

Session 3 Lectures, note-taking, Understanding Assignment questions & locating Information

Score **Number of Learners (total 9)**

5 Very useful **x 6**
4 Useful **x 3**
3 OK
2 Not very useful
1 Not at all useful

Positives	Negatives
Made me aware of what is expected of me	
Useful to get title of assignment, as had plenty of time to complete. Useful when we broke down assignment, had a better idea of what's required	
Different ways to note-take	
What to expect from a lecture	
Very useful information	
Good use of handouts- not having to make notes meant you could truly listen.	
Enjoyed learning how to construct & what is an assignment	
Good tips to achieve understanding, having never completed an assignment before	
Was very helpful; helped me to understand what tutor was looking for in assignments	

Session 4 Writing Assignments (1): Preparation, Planning & Structure

Score **Number of Learners (total 9)**

5 Very useful x 7
4 Useful x 2
3 OK
2 Not very useful
1 Not at all useful

Positives	Negatives
This session was excellent I think I have learnt more than ever	Pleased I only did a plan of assignment; if I had written it I probably would have had to start again after this session, with all the suggestions and needs to my assignment.
Very informative	I already knew some techniques for planning an essay
Learning 'BUG' technique & descriptions & definitions of essay questions	
Learning essay format	
Understood what I needed to put in the assignment better	
Good use of time	
All useful information to enable correct planning & structure of assignment - all previously unknown	
Taught me how to prepare and plan and the purpose of writing assignments	

Session 5 Writing Assignments (2): Written Style, Writing Skills, Referencing & Plagiarism

Score **Number of Learners (total 9)**

5 Very useful **x 6**
4 Useful **x 3**
3 OK
2 Not very useful
1 Not at all useful

Positives	Negatives
Referencing & writing a bibliography will be one of the most useful aspects of the course, making me more confident.	Plagiarism exercise made me more frightened to copy anything for assignment.
Bibliography formats	
What is or isn't plagiarism	
Correct Harvard reference for different references	
Very useful information – didn't know any of this	
Harvard referencing system good	
Plagiarism needed to be explained due to consequences	
Referencing useful but will take time to get used to	
Was able to assess my writing style, and how to reference correctly	

Session 6 Reports, Seminar Presentations, Review & Consolidation of Progress, Course Evaluation.

Score **Number of Learners (total 9)**

5 Very useful **x 6**

4 Useful **x 2**

3 OK

2 Not very useful

1 Not at all useful

Not present for session **x 1**

Positives	Negatives
I realised that I could use PowerPoint & I now feel confident to complete my degree.	I was very negative to start with
Given me confidence to do a PowerPoint presentation in my course, as already completed one	Presentation thought was 'scary'
PowerPoint presentation - needed this to see how it works, can be used etc & overcome worries about presenting.	
Got rid of the fear about speaking in front of others	
Built up confidence	
Surprisingly, presentation went OK	
PowerPoint appeared terrifying but was actually fine	

Overall comments

I think this was an excellent course I feel I have learnt so much in a short period of time. <Tutor> really knows her stuff, many thanks.

A very valuable course.

Opportunity to get to know the College before embarking on main degree

I have ended the course feeling much more confident than when I started.

<Tutor> has put us at ease throughout and has given an excellent informative course.

Appendix 2

Group Evaluations

Learners were asked to discuss the overall positives and negatives of the course and record it on a flipchart. The tutor left the room for 15 minutes to enable free discussion to take place.

Positives

- Learning to reference
- Meeting other candidates
- Familiar with environment
- How to write assignments
- Do PowerPoint/presentations
- Nice biscuits!
- 6 weeks is ideal
- Good handouts
- Good access to computers
- Timings were good (9.00-1.00)

Negatives

- Library session
- Short coffee breaks
- Not enough time to reflect
- Publicity was poor
- Careers advice was poor
- College environment (teenagers).

L. Simpson
4th July 2008