

national transition support team

working together to improve transition
for disabled young people

Blackburn College Transition Case Study

Top Tips

- Understand the flexibility of the curriculum, and the ability to unitise it to make it accessible to a wider range of people.
- Understand that personalised support is on a continuum.
- Question why a person is being denied access to a service, and challenge decisions.
- Start with one student, show what can be achieved.
- Begin working with people that are enthusiastic and want to see the system changed.
- People below entry level need particularly to have their learning highly personalised.
- In a college working toward inclusive practices all the work that contributes to supporting the learner with needs inevitably adds value to other learners who do not have this label.

Blackburn College is a large general further education college, and offers a range of courses from pre-entry to higher education level. It has over 15000 full and part-time learners and around 4000 are aged between 16 and 18 and studying on further education courses. The Additional Learning Support service has contact with approximately 1200 learners from across all areas of the College each year. The College attracts many young people from Blackburn with Darwen, but also has a large number of people from the surrounding area of Lancashire.

The Additional Learning Support service is responsible for providing support to learners with additional needs. Blackburn College disbanded the discrete provision for people with special needs around 13 years ago, and now all young people described as having special needs are supported to access their chosen area of study within the College on mainstream courses. This is all done through funding from the Learning and Skills Council for Additional Learning Support.

Blackburn College provides support for young people in College, based on an individual assessment of their needs. For learners with high levels of support needs this often means making some changes to the curriculum. Many courses can be split into units, and each unit can then be split into elements. This then enables young people with high needs to access elements or units of a course, without having to complete the whole thing. Young people who are not able to complete a whole Entry Level course for example, have an Individual Learning Programme. This outlines their goals and sets targets to meet them. These goals may include both personal and social elements as well as those directly connected to their area of learning. Support is used across the timetable including break and lunchtimes for those who need it and support staff offer personal care where required.

The College has a dedicated Transition Worker who supports young people with the transition from attending school to College. They attend annual reviews or parents evenings for those who are planning to come to the College. She is also responsible for collecting Statements and S140's prior to the learners attending the College. The Transition Worker maintains a database; of all application forms received that flag that the applicant has declared they have additional support needs.

The College offer an orientation period during the summer holidays, to enable potential full time students to find their way around the College campus and meet some of the Learning Support Staff, whilst it is quiet and to practice travelling to and from College if they need to. Transport is available for some young people until the age of 19; however the College actively encourages those who are able to travel independently to do so and liaises with external agencies from the local social services department to Guide Dogs UK to provide suitable training.

The Additional Learning Support Service is large and includes 40 support workers, note-takers and communication support workers and 30 specialist support tutors. Specialist support tutors are particularly important for young people with visual or hearing impairments, to support them to access courses fully. Two support workers are trained in Facilitated Communication specifically to meet the needs of those with an autistic spectrum disorder. The areas of curriculum are divided into five centres in the College, and each has a Curriculum Support Coordinator, responsible for ensuring that the learners are receiving the support that they need within that Centre.

Blackburn College are reviewing the information that they provide in their prospectus. Due to their ongoing commitment to developing an inclusive College they do not have special needs provision as a separate curriculum area and therefore do not currently advertise courses under this label. This is proving confusing to parents and potential students as it seems to indicate that the College does not offer any provision for people with higher levels of support need working at 'pre-entry'. The fact is that there is a great deal of work at this level but it is not a 'special needs' course. The provision is in every area from Catering and Hair and Beauty to Motor Vehicle and Media studies. It is envisaged that they will need to advertise 'provision for learners with Special Needs' and then go on to explain the College's version of this provision.

Disabled young people who attend the College and access Individual Learning Programmes are listed separately and their retention, achievement and success are monitored outside of the course that they are placed within. This ensures that learners who are not able to complete the whole course of study that they are undertaking, due to their high levels of support need, are not negatively affecting the overall success rate for the course, which is an important consideration for colleges as all courses funded by the LSC are benchmarked for success nationally. Those on ISPs are clearly working to different goals and targets than those undertaking a course in full and should therefore not be compared. Some young

people may not leave the College with a full qualification, however they are able to access a course that enables them to develop in areas that they have chosen and the certification that they receive or acknowledgement of achievement will have currency and be understood outside of education. Many of the young people accessing the Individual Learning Programmes are unable to achieve the required literacy and numeracy levels that are required to gain a full qualification at the Entry Levels but can produce vocationally relevant and competent work at much higher levels...the true spiky profile. Therefore they are supported to improve these skills on an individual basis and in a vocationally relevant context.

The College is able to provide services for people with a wide range of needs due to their inclusive approaches. One young person described as having a severe learning disability, and who does not use verbal communication was supported to access taster sessions over a period of a year. Also during this period learning support tutors were able to assess his needs. Through staff learning to understand his particular methods of communication they were able to put together a programme that it was clear he wished to do. This was eventually seen to be computing. The Additional Learning Support Service employs an Access Technology Assessor/Trainer, and he has used access technology such as switches for the computer and a communication board to facilitate the student's involvement in an Entry level ICT course. These additional pieces of equipment/software were then used by the class tutor supported by this learner to give a tutorial on access technology to the rest of the group!

The College runs Entry Level courses in most subject areas and these are supported by the Additional Learning Support team. Many learners who are at this level have support needs. Entry level courses can also be completed over a longer period of time as another way of meeting individual learning needs. Therefore a course which would normally take one year to complete on a full time basis may be completed over two years if this is more appropriate.

Blackburn College have concerns about what will happen to their provision when the funding returns to the local authority. They are reliant on the funding that they receive from the Learning and Skills Council to provide the support to young people. There is the perceived possibility that the local authority may divert some of the funding to other providers.

The manager of the Additional Learning Support Service at Blackburn College has applied to the LSC for funding to support young people to access employment. The LSC agreed to fund £50,000, with an agreed target of supporting 13 people into employment. The 13 are being selected through an interview process, and will follow an apprenticeship model. It will involve spending some time each week in College, on a course related to the area of work and some time in the workplace. Support will be provided initially by the College and it is envisaged that by working with external agencies and employers that a range of ways in which young people can be supported into work in a sustainable way will be created.

Young people who use the Additional Learning Support service have the opportunity to feedback on the services that they receive in a Learning Support Feedback Sheet. They are also provided with information about how to complain should the need arise. The information is gathered and used to inform improvements to the service.

Sara Merriman
Practice Development Coordinator

national transition support team
Information line: 0207 843 6348
Email: tsp@ncb.org.uk
Web: www.transitionsupportprogramme.org.uk