

Improving the
employability
of 14 to 19 year olds
in South London

Phase three
-
Trials of materials
-
Interim report

March 2007

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Phase 3 – Trialling of materials

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Introduction

The project for improving the employability of 14 to 19 year olds in South London was initiated in the autumn of 2005. The local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for South London commissioned Business Education London South (BELS), the local education business links consortia, to undertake a review of provision in all the South London boroughs (Phase One) as a preparation for developing an education strategy for the boroughs that will improve the employability of young people in the area (Phase Two). The review was based upon research and analyses of current policy documents and evaluations of developing provision. A copy of the review can be found on the South London Partnership web site. The strategy was produced in June 2006.

A third phase was then introduced early in the autumn of 2007 through which eight institutions in South London with post 16 learners undertook to trial a set of materials to use with students as a means of developing their employability as well as helping them identify how their learning programmes can promote employability. Teachers from the schools and colleges met with staff from BELS, and with the consultant, for an introduction to the materials on 8 November 2006. From November 2006 onwards staff in each of the eight schools/colleges worked with a selected group of students trialling the processes and materials. Each institution produced an interim review for the end of March 2007. This report is based upon those reviews and discussions between staff from the schools and colleges at two steering group meetings on 17 January and 28 March 2007.

The institutions

- Bromley College (Rosemary Lacarova, Viv Barratt and Sheila Elliot)
- Charles Darwin School, Bromley (Kenny Wheeler)
- Croydon College, (Sue McKeone)
- Glenthorne High School, Sutton (Stephen Morgan)
- Holy Cross School, Kingston (Lynn Gordon)
- John Ruskin (6th form) College, Croydon (Jackie Mitchell)
- Ravensbourne School, Bromley (Karen Moorey)
- Ursuline High School, Merton (LucyTeuma)

Each institution identified their own cohort which varied from students taking A/AS levels, through those on BTEC courses to others on one year vocational programmes. Support for students was mainly provided by tutors but in some cases the support was led by a subject teacher.

The programme

a) WHAMI – Students worked with teachers using the Work-related Learning Halton Mapping Instrument (WHAMI) to identify which of QCA's work-related learning outcomes had been achieved during Key Stage 4.

b) Employability discussion materials – Teachers from the eight institutions were provided with a set of discussion materials to introduce the concept and nature of employability to their students.

C) Self-review – students were then able to complete a self-review based upon the Central London employability framework, which had been chosen as the basis for future work on improving employability in South London

d) Action plan – Students then completed an action plan identifying how they would each seek to develop those elements of employability that had emerged as their main areas of weakness.

Responses from teachers

a) WHAMI

The teachers were divided over the use of the computer based programme. Four said they found the programme straightforward and easy to use with their students and three of them felt it was very useful. They particularly valued how it enabled them to identify gaps in prior provision, how it reminded learners of what had happened in KS4 and it provided an excellent overview of the total provision of Work Related-learning in their institutions.

On the other hand three teachers felt it was very time consuming and one found the process very convoluted for the students. Concerns were raised by three teachers about the language as it was originally produced by QCA for teacher to use and not for students. Three also felt it would be better if the reports could be printed with the name of the student.

There was general agreement that the process requires a high level of one-to-one support from teachers, and that it needs breaking down into smaller sessions. Some concerns were raised about the timing of the process. In future it would need to take place at the start of year 12 so that students had a clearer memory of what had occurred during KS4.

b) The employability discussion materials

Teachers were again divided in their responses. Four teachers found that the materials were easy to use, useful and a good and interesting way of introducing the concept and nature of employability. They especially liked the questionnaire relating to what employers wanted from young recruits – produced as a result of phase two of the project.

On the other hand three teachers found the language of the materials too hard for their students, and two of them also felt that the self-review was too long and that many of the students lost interest while working their way through it.

It is evident that some of the teachers had not taken in the guidance produced to go with the materials. They had been encouraged to adapt the materials to their own circumstances and it was made clear there was a need for teachers to work with students in understanding the materials. One teacher did not realise that the absence of questions on the discussion cards was deliberate to prevent closed responses from students.

c) The action plans

The teachers were again divided in their responses. Two were very positive about them and described them as straightforward, logical and easy to use. Whereas as three found them very difficult to use with their students.

Problems were identified because the plans sought to bring together two very different frameworks (i.e. WHAMI and the Central London Employability Framework) and some teachers felt they were too different for the process to be effective. Where students did not like the outcome of the WHAMI review they were reluctant to plan to meet the deficiencies that had been identified – especially if they did not relate to their post-16 courses. There was also a concern by some teachers that the language of the plan was not user-friendly.

Again it emerged that the process required a high level of teacher support for learners and that there was not always enough time to provide such support.

Issues emerging from the review

1. Student response – Most of the teachers reported that most of their students found the process helpful, interesting and worthwhile. Difficulties emerged when it came to identifying how they could move forward to improve their employability.
2. The time frame – Phase three of the project suffered from the fact that the schools and colleges were only introduced to the materials in November and therefore could not begin working with students until December or January. This made it much more difficult to help students think back to KS4 as well as forward to develop their employability.
3. The language of the materials. Although some teachers found it easy to use the materials with their students the sources of much of the text for the materials were originally written for the benefit of teachers and other adults working with young people. Future versions of the materials may need to be adapted. It emerges that WHAMI can be re-written into a more user friendly language. The employability documents could be adapted but they are mostly based on quotations from varied sources.
4. Self-direction – The original thesis for the project was that students would take responsibility for developing their own employability by working through the materials and by following up on their individual action plans. The experience of most of the teachers (even those who were most positive about the materials) was that few students were capable of managing the responsibility. The process requires a very high level of one-to-one support by teachers.
5. The teacher guidance will need adapting in the light of the experiences of the teachers involved in the project.
6. Good access to ICT equipment is essential for the process to run smoothly.
7. Students would benefit from the process even more if local employers could be brought into the work at an early stage.
8. Staff from the Connexions Service need to understand what is happening in each of the institutions involved as they are in a special position to be able to support students in enacting their action plans. Links need to be drawn between students KS4 careers action plans and those developed for the project..
9. Post 16 work experience has an important role to play in supporting initiatives of this nature. There is a DFES expectation that all post-16 students will have a five day placement as part of their course. Where such placements occur students are more likely to be able to work on developing the necessary attributes for employability.
10. Activities within post-16 courses that help students to improve their writing of application letters and forms and CVs, and that develop their interview skills are essential for the success of the project.
11. Opportunities for voluntary work within the school/college or the local community have been identified as useful for supporting the aims of the project.
12. The employability of 14 to 19 year olds would be enhanced if schools provided all learners with a record for what had been achieved through their work-related learning and enterprise programmes in Key Stage 4. This would enable post 16 teachers to help students plan their progression. Some form of record of achievement, Progress file, Individual Learning Plan or e profile would improve the effectiveness of the project.
13. Subject leaders in post-16 institutions need to be aware of the project and need to work with tutors and careers staff to plan how students can be supported in their endeavours to develop their employability. It is possible for a group or class report to be produced from the input into WHAMI.
14. It may be advisable to help students focus in on a few skills that will be essential for improving their employability prospects rather than on a broad range of skills where there are clear weaknesses.
15. Some of the skills identified in the two frameworks and the list of employer preferences are very mature concepts and many 16 to 17 year old students may

struggle to understand them, let alone be able to demonstrate competence in them. This however does not diminish their importance in terms of the general overall employability of young people. Teacher guidance and support will be essential.

Recommendations

1. The institutions involved could benefit from a second round of the process providing they were able to plan implementation in June/July and could begin the process early in September.
2. Work should begin on adapting WHAMI in the light of the concerns of many of the teachers.
3. The materials for introducing the concept of employability should be adapted and increased to allow a wider range of choice for teachers. If possible they should be produced to a higher quality than in the trials.
4. The teacher guidance should be revised in the light of the trials and produced to a higher quality.
5. An explanation of the project should be produced for senior staff and subject teachers in the institutions involved in the project, identifying how they can support students involved.
6. 11 to 19 institutions involved in the project should be encouraged to consider how best to track and record how employability is developed at Key Stages 3 and 4 so that teachers working with post 16 learners have a better idea of the skills that need supporting.
7. Post 16 institutions working on developing employability need to work with feeder schools from Key Stage 4 to help identify which skills need the most support.
8. The Connexions services in each of the boroughs should be informed of the work and invited to support teachers and students in the institutions involved.
9. The EBPs in each of the boroughs should be informed of the work and asked to support the institutions by identifying some local employers who would be willing and able to support teachers in introducing the concept and nature of employability.
10. Attention should be given to how the provision of work experience for post-16 learners can be increased in each of the boroughs and adapted to meet the objectives of the project.
11. The dissemination events for each of the boroughs planned for May to September can be used to clarify the objectives of the project and to invite other institutions to consider how they could introduce the work for their students. Particular focus could be given to those schools and colleges involved in the Gateway for the new diplomas and others involved in the trials of the functional skills.
12. Awareness of the project should be spread to employer and training organisations across the six boroughs with a view to engaging their support and to helping the students involved to find potential employers who understand the project.

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John Allen is an independent education consultant for the 14 to 19 curriculum, specialising in careers education and guidance, personal development and vocational and work-related learning. Until his retirement in August 2000, he was Principal Officer: Work-related learning at QCA and a member of their 14-19 Curriculum Section. He managed QCA's programme relating to the development of work-related learning and careers education and guidance within the curriculum and qualifications for 14 to 19 year olds. He is the author of a range of publications on vocational and work-related learning from the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) and the Learning and Skills Network (LSN).
