

TITLE:

Community-Campus' – Learner Involvement at Wiltshire College

DATE:

June 2008



INSTITUTION PROFILE

FE college

4 campuses

4000 full time FE and HE students

SUMMARY

Community-Campus is the brand under which Wiltshire College delivers its enrichment activities. But it is much more than a traditional enrichment programme, covering subjects as diverse as bullying, equality and diversity, citizenship, sustainable development and volunteering. A unique feature is the emphasis on students supporting students through a number of different schemes and students creating awareness-raising displays to educate their peers. The programme has been praised as 'outstanding' by Ofsted and is credited with helping improve student retention rates.

EAUC COMMENT

Wiltshire College's 'Community-Campus' provides a clear and effective way to ensure student engagement in sustainability, whilst ensuring compliance with Government initiatives.

THE PROBLEM

In common with many other colleges, Wiltshire College decided in 2005 not to continue to reserve Wednesday afternoons for enrichment activities. This was due to poor student participation and pressure to use the time for the normal lesson programme. It needed another way of delivering enrichment activities and, as government initiatives encouraging citizenship, volunteering and healthy schools were beginning to appear, the college decided to try to combine all of these into one initiative.

The inclusion of the Every Child Matters agenda on the Ofsted Common Inspection Framework was another driver for the Community-Campus initiative.

Equally important drivers have been the key staff involved – particularly the Student Liaison Officer at the Chippenham campus and the Senior Student Counsellor. Support from Principals, both past and present, has been invaluable – they have promoted the merits of this programme and provided resources to match.

THE APPROACH

The overall responsibility for the programme lies with the Student Liaison Manager working with both student liaison, and other key members of the wider Community-Campus Team, involving college counsellors, and guidance service managers. Commitment is also required from senior tutors who encourage tutors to take up involvement.

A calendar of events was developed, which by 2008 was three-times bigger than the original in 2005/2006. The college looks at all established national and international events, such as National Blood Donor Month and Recycling Week, and chooses the ones most appropriate for the themes of the programme that year. Choosing established days allows the messages to be reinforced outside of college, for example by media reporting of activities. These events are then supplemented by others devised by the college. The programme has grown year on year, and this year includes themed initiatives covering sustainable development, peer mentoring, the Learner Involvement Strategy and the College's Equality and Diversity Action Plan.

The programme consists of presentations from internal or external experts, workshops, fact sheets, quizzes, displays, campaigns, visits and social occasions and a network of student volunteers delivering peer mentoring schemes. The peer mentoring schemes are a service provided by trained student volunteers covering sexual health and also providing a listening service for students' problems.

Dedicated rooms have been refurbished so that the activities have a place to be delivered and the college employs four Community-Campus Gap Year Assistants - students who have finished college, and take on a year-long paid post.

The scheme is advertised through tutorials, the intranet and by other students, in student social areas.

GOALS

- Empower students by raising their awareness of environmental and other issues in a student-orientated way
- Deliver the Every Child Matters agenda and further assist tutors by delivering specific elements, such as bullying workshops
- Change students' lives by involving them in environmental and socio-environmental projects, encouraging social cohesion and community development
- Challenge beliefs, habits and lifestyles, allowing students to make informed life choices
- Enrich students' college experience

OBSTACLES AND SOLUTIONS

Obstacles

- Getting senior management support for the programme
- Engaging students in the programme
- Raise awareness of important issues in a way that students retain information
- Getting the tutors on side
- Pressure on the timetable meant there was no Community-College dedicated time

Solutions

- Presented to the Management Team and linked project goals to Ofsted success – the new self-assessment report had to include information on how the college is delivering the Every Child Matters agenda and the Community-Campus provided the activities to demonstrate this
- Present the programme in a branded way, relevant to the students. The Community-Campus initiative has its own logo and branding which appears on everything linked to the project
- Use a variety of ways of delivering the activities – workshops, visits, discussions
Be aware of differing levels of ability when creating factsheets, and make them student friendly
- Present Community-Campus in a way that will help them to deliver subjects, as opposed to creating more work
- Create designated areas for Community-Campus and ensure information is displayed for a minimum of one week so everyone gets chance to see it

PERFORMANCE AND RESULTS

- Due to the increasingly clear links with Ofsted performance, senior management have realised Community-Campus' potential to deliver on several key fronts - learner involvement, equality & diversity, ECM, health & safety and quality improvement - and have included it as one of the 10 key objectives in the new vision statement for the college
- Student retention rates have increased year on year
- Community-Campus has been described as 'outstanding' by Ofsted (Oct 2007), has gained 'Healthy College' status (Wiltshire County Council, Dec 2007) and was shortlisted for an EAUC Green Gown Award 2008
- The college has gained local and national recognition for the high-profile programme in just three years
- It has improved on the previously inadequate enrichment programme which had poor overall participation rates
- Positive feedback indicates that the programme has captured the imagination of students and staff
- It actively helps young people to make a positive contribution, acknowledged in the recent Ofsted inspection of residential care standards at our land based Lackham campus, and suggests students both enjoy and achieve whilst at Wiltshire College

LESSONS LEARNT

- Support from senior management, especially the principal, is essential and sends a positive message which reinforces the programme
- The programme needs to be flexible so it can be easily adapted to suit different sites or groups of students
- Constant evaluation of the programme allows it to stay up-to-date and pertinent to the needs of the students
- You have to be realistic - the demands on the programme get bigger all the time. Resourcing must be ample to support controlled growth and new initiatives should not always take priority over tried and tested components
- A continuous turn-over of students as they graduate from college means that staff time is always needed, even for established initiatives
- New initiatives are great, but must be balanced with the real danger of losing momentum if too many are introduced due to not having enough resources

FURTHER INFORMATION

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Links:

Wiltshire College www.wiltscoll.ac.uk

Every Child Matters www.everychildmatters.gov.uk

Ofsted www.ofsted.gov.uk



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