

Case Study: Life skills students and the college quality development plan

'Assessment and learning: involving the learner'. LSC funded project.

**The context:**

South Tyneside College offers a wide range of courses in most subjects, from GCSE to Foundation Degrees and vocational qualifications. Students may attend college as part of their school studies or as individuals of any age enrolling on subjects of particular interest. Over 17,000 students choose to study at South Tyneside College every year - from the local community, across the UK and over 30 countries worldwide.

Inclusive Learning Department is within the Learner Support and Foundation Studies Faculty and the demographics of the students are aged 16+, with either mild/moderate/severe learning difficulties and/or additional support needs. Courses offered are centred on Independent Living Skills and Vocational areas.

Life Skills is a course for those students with more moderate/severe learning difficulties and/or additional support needs. The emphasis is on real life activities to develop and enhance personal, social and independent living skills. Students learn skills through subjects such as drama, cookery, personal lifestyles and ICT.

The challenge:

Within the first term of college, Life Skills students are required to complete a Quality Development Plan questionnaire, concerning their course and college environment.

We feel the original document is complicated by irrelevant and complex questions that in most circumstances are beyond the students comprehension. There are far too many questions, 74 in total, asked in the document which would require the students to concentrate for a long period of time, and this would prove problematic for some. We have decided to design a document with a more simplistic approach and at a level appropriate to our students.

What we did:

Time Line

- Research variants of original QDP document
- Students take part in completing original document
- Team meeting to discuss students feedback/
- Planning – time to devise suitable questions and discuss options for new document design

- Prototype of document completed by students
- Review and evaluate students comments
- Peer review by colleagues
- Produce final amended questionnaire
- Students to participate in questionnaire activity individually and in a group

The outcomes:

We found we were able to design a more simplistic document best suited to our students. As this was presented as PowerPoint it engaged the student's attention and helped keep them focused.

As a control measure the questions were asked both individually and as a group to give a comparison of student answers. We were also aware that we were able to enhance our IT skills during this innovative project.


The impact:

As a result of this project we found students responded well to the more visual format of the questionnaire, and had a better understanding of the questions set due to the photo prompts. They all participated and appeared to enjoy the activity, and we feel we received honest answers to the questions set.

We have discussed this innovation with our head of department and he was very interested in the student response to the new format. We have discussed ways of implementing the changes to meet the college's quality assurance programme, whilst insuring the inclusiveness of the document.

We would like to develop this further by seeking advice from our IT department to see if it can be produced as an interactive programme. We also feel it would be beneficial to both the students and our college if we divided the questionnaire into specific areas and conducted the survey within different terms during the academic year. The Head of Inclusive Learning Department is very interested in using the developed questionnaire as a way of gathering information for data purposes.

In the future we would like to develop different formats of this project to make it as inclusive as possible.

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