

# **OUTSTANDING TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT**

**FINAL REPORT ON THE OTLA PHASE 6 (ENGLISH) PROJECT -  
IMPROVING ENGAGEMENT IN 16-19 STUDY PROGRAMME**

**Southend Adult Community College**

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The programme was delivered by -



CLAIRE COLLINS  
consultancy

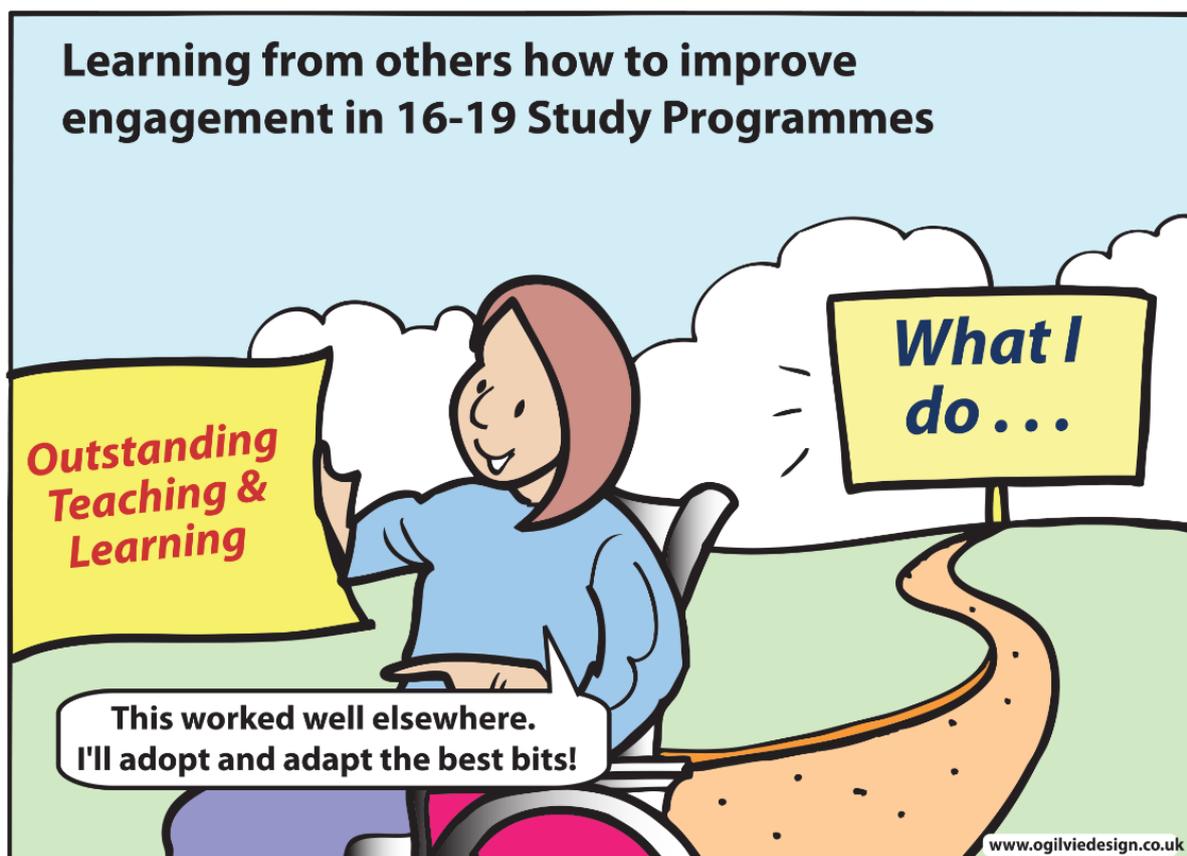


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# Final Report - Improving engagement in 16-19 Study Programme

## Southend Adult Community College



The aim of this project was to increase attendance and engagement in English Study Programme groups and therefore improve achievement. Any success would be disseminated to the maths and vocational teams where achievement is also below target.

### Summary

The College, as its name suggests, works mainly with adults. We also have a small but growing provision for 16-19 year olds through a Study Programme, currently 55 learners. The majority are unable to access provision at the FE college in Southend for personal or academic reasons. Therefore, the majority of our cohort is made up of vulnerable young adults, with a poor educational experience and/or low academic skills, especially in maths and English.

In September 2018 we started to offer an alternative provision for 14-16 year olds and currently have 15 on a dual role relationship with the schools.

### Rationale

In the 19 plus provision the College performs well, retention is high and achievement is above national averages and in some curriculum areas still increasing. This includes the maths and English Functional Skills provision.

Quality of teaching and learning is good or outstanding.

However, in the Study Programme, attendance in English classes is poor which impacts on achievement. Tutors are not trained to work with this age group and in some cases struggle to deliver engaging lessons with appropriate resources. Behaviour management is also an issue.

By working collaboratively with other colleges, it was hoped that we would be able to introduce new ideas and share good practice.

English tutors would plan with vocational tutors to maximise opportunities for embedding English in the vocational lessons and to ensure the English lessons were contextualised to the learners' vocational pathways.

It is not possible to contextualise every lesson and activity to the vocational pathway as the Functional Skills English assessments include speaking and listening, reading and writing activities on a wide range of topics and learners need to be prepared for this. In these lessons, tutors would identify resources more appropriate to the age group.

If learners can see the relevance of the English skills they are developing hopefully this will improve attendance and engagement which will have a positive impact on behaviour and achievement.

## Approach

Vocational tutors provided their schemes of work to the English team to ensure opportunities for embedding English were maximised.

Meetings between the teaching teams have continued to be difficult to arrange due to working patterns and availability. Because of this the Study Programme Manager introduced daily "Blast meetings" at 9am every morning for the whole team including English and maths tutors. These happen before classes start at 9.30am making it easier for tutors to attend. A range of issues are discussed including topics due to be covered in vocational lessons over the coming weeks. Although not ideal, it is a start and, from September 2020, the timetable will be organised to ensure tutors have a slot to meet and plan together.

We are in the early stages of working with an external software designer who is developing an app with learning resources in a virtual learning environment aimed especially at young people. Our learners will be involved as pilot users of the app and provide feedback. The initial meeting has taken place and the designers are making revisions based on our feedback.

The project has been discussed with the learners and their feedback and opinions have been gathered on a more regular basis. One-word feedback on post it notes at the end of each lesson was given by the learners. The feedback has informed lesson planning.

Two English tutors visited Cambridge Regional College, one of our project partners to meet with the team, observe some lessons and pick up some good practice especially around behaviour management.

During my time working as a Teaching Assistant in a primary school I saw a successful raffle ticket system introduced to reward punctuality, attendance, engagement or good behaviour. I asked one of the English tutors to introduce this in two groups and within a week this had a very positive impact. In the first lesson learners who, until then had produced very little work, produced a good amount of writing. Raffle tickets were given out and learners told the more tickets they had the better their chance of winning the prize. The prize - a voucher - was funded with money from the project. Learners were actually surprised when the raffle draw went ahead and learners received a prize as they didn't believe it would really happen. They said *"we don't trust teachers"*.

More project-based work has been introduced and attendance improves during these times. An example is the organisation and hosting of a MacMillan coffee morning. During and after the project the learners discussed and identified which skills they had been developing – this included English, maths, ICT and employability

## Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

Learner feedback was collected at the end of each lesson – a range of methods was used including verbal feedback, post it notes or written feedback. As a result, the duration of lesson activities is shorter. Learners say they like lots of small tasks.

They like a mixture of vocational context, exam preparation and projects. This has taken the pressure off English tutors to feel they have to constantly contextualise work.

During the first Birmingham dissemination event another project talked about using flipped learning. I passed this idea on to the tutors. Unfortunately, this hasn't been tried as learners never do homework so they felt this wasn't suitable at the moment.

Learners said they felt they should be able to negotiate their assessment dates and this has happened to a certain degree.

Reflecting on how the learners reacted to receiving a voucher has made me think about when learners take their English Functional Skills assessments. In order to achieve an English Functional Skills qualification learners have to take 3 assessments in Speaking and Listening, Reading and Writing. We stagger these over a period of 4 months. Attendance at exams is sporadic.

To try to improve attendance at exams and motivate learners to keep on track we issued college certificates of achievement for the reading exam. In some cases, this was the first certificate of achievement that some learners had received in a long time. So far results and attendance at the writing exam have improved from last year.

As the result of one of our Skype meetings with our mentor and partners on the OTLA project we were invited to visit Cambridge Regional College. Two of our English tutors visited and observed classes to pick up good practice in behaviour management.

Whilst the college has a focus on improvements that need to be made both in the Self-Assessment Report and the Quality Improvement Plan, a member of the Senior Leadership team led the project to demonstrate the College's commitment. Ideas and decisions have been made jointly with the tutors and this has empowered them to be part of the improvement process. They feel that not only are Senior Managers on board but they are starting to see a change and some "quick wins".

## Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

There is evidence of improved collaborative working between vocational and English tutors but this needs to increase and happen on a more frequent basis. Very recently the line management of English tutors on the Study Programme moved to the Study Programme Manager rather than the English Programme Manager. This has brought the teams together and, hopefully, opened up the lines of communication. The manager of the programme has introduced daily early morning "blasts" open to all members of the Study Programme team.

Groups have been rearranged so there are smaller groups of learners but at the same level.

At a higher level, on reflection, there will be a change in focus on tutor recruitment. Up until now we have placed tutors on to the programme with teaching qualifications, an English specialism and sometimes no real experience of teaching this age group. We are now focusing more on how potential tutors engage learners and manage behaviour. We will still require tutors to have the relevant specialist qualifications but we are able to support them with this. It is easier to teach/support a tutor how to teach English than to find a tutor who can work with and engage this particular age group and manage their behaviour.

## Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Because of the nature of the cohort we are working with, the duration of the project has been too short to show impact. A high proportion of learners who come to us take several months just to settle in to the routine of College before they are even ready to engage in learning. I feel the full impact of the project work will not be seen until next academic year when we start working with a new cohort and can implement from day one what we have learned from this project.

Although the project has now finished, we will continue with the work in the college and continue to trial and implement all the ideas I have "stolen" from the other projects. There are so many good ideas that have been tried and tested and we are excited to try them out this year and in to the next academic year.

Attendance in English remains an issue. However, initial results from the speaking and listening and reading assessments show an improvement both in attendance on the day and achievement.

## Learning from this project

Working in collaboration with other colleges and listening to presentations at the regional meetings has been reassuring to the extent that we are not unique in the challenges of working with this age group.

It has been very motivating for tutors both in visiting another provider but also there is a change in the perception that we know where improvements need to be made and we are seen to be taking action by the team.

We have gained a huge amount of knowledge of good practice happening elsewhere and ideas that we wish to implement and trial.