



PROJECT WEEK REPORT

2nd project week | 13 – 16 May 2019 (West Lothian
College, Scotland)

ABSTRACT

Students are increasingly subject to social, financial and health difficulties which may impede their learning journey and potentially prevent continuation of their studies. West Lothian College has developed an integrated system of support and intervention designed to help students to remain at college and achieve successful outcomes

QUALITY CATEGORY

- Guidance
- Learning
- Examination

QMS4VET Consortium

The partners within the QMS4VET project are:

- Aventus (www.ventus.nl)
- ATEC (www.atec.pt)
- BBS Syke EUROPASCHULE (www.bbs-syke.de)
- bit Schulungcenter (www.bitschulungcenter.at)
- West Lothian College (www.west-lothian.ac.uk)
- Kainuun ammattiopisto (www.kao.fi)



INTRODUCTION

West Lothian College is a Further Education Institution located in Livingston, West Lothian, in the Central belt of Scotland close to Edinburgh. West Lothian is experiencing economic and population growth which is set to continue but also recognises multiple levels of deprivation within the population which impacts negatively on mental and physical health and employability. The College has a focus on providing vocational training for industry but is now also focused on education for students from age 16 upwards and engaged in the learner journey from school to college to university.

The College put together a team of colleagues from across curriculum and service areas to showcase the integrated support system which has been developed and implemented in reaction to the growing demand from existing and prospective students for support with physical, mental and learning difficulties in order to achieve success in their learning programmes. This is a system which can be adapted to suit the circumstances of any interested organisation.

For more information about the QMS4VET project and other project week reports see <https://www.ventus.nl/qms4vet>

OBJECTIVES

The following objectives were set for best practice with respect to the West Lothian College guidance approach:

Ensure:

1. Learners successfully complete their learning programme;
2. Existing problems are identified or recognised at the earliest opportunity;
3. Learners are well informed and well supported;
4. There is an efficient evaluation system to feedback to management from students.

METHODOLOGY

The overall aim of the West Lothian integrated support initiatives is to allow all our students access to learning programmes, a safe and welcoming learning journey and ultimately, successful learning outcomes. In order to ensure this, the following objectives have to be met:

1. Learners successfully complete their learning programme

In the context of the West Lothian College guidance approach, the guidance system ought to be designed in such a way that student's challenges will be overcome and lead to a successful completion of the learning programme.

An efficient guidance and support system should ensure that, at the end of the learning programme, each student is capable of achieving the best possible qualification according to the ECVET standards (knowledge, skills and competences).

2. Existing problems are identified or recognised at the earliest opportunity

Students should be encouraged to declare a support need and to seek help and support at every stage of approach to the college, from first enquiry to application, then enrolment and onwards through their entire learning journey.



The process for students to engage with the support team should be well-advertised and very visible in the places that students would look for information. The process should be clear and easy to understand and all staff should be aware and ready to help students to make an approach to the support team.

3. Learners are well informed and well supported

The students should receive a positive induction in to the College ensuring a warm welcome and a safe start. During the first month, all students should be kept informed about the support available to them including learning support, Student Association and any personal support that may be needed.

During the learning process students should be supported if needed. Students must be able to ask for support at any time from their Support Team, who can then respond immediately, together with the lecturer, by putting the appropriate measures in place.

4. There is an efficient evaluation system to feedback to management from students

An effective evaluation tool, such as the 'Sparkle' model, should be developed and rolled out at specified times. Feedback should be provided to all internal and external stakeholders and management act on feedback to make improvements.

SWOT ANALYSIS

The following analyses the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) of the West Lothian College case study.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lecturers can concentrate on teaching and do not have to worry about basic guidance, as other colleagues carry out this responsibility Support team numbers are flexible for example the team growing on demand when increased support and guidance is needed The learner journey is clear and the path the students follow is clear and well organised The support team is located in one area and information is held centrally Barriers to learning are reduced for the students Mental health care is important to the team The Student Induction process raises the profile of the support team and other support available, helps students to understand the procedures and helps the student to feel welcome, improving the attendance of the students and allowing them to focus on their courses, as they are well prepared and informed Support workers have good relationships and partnerships with external agencies to support the students, for example social work, mental health agencies etc The Student Association has developed excellent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulty in recruitment of specialist/qualified staff A budget must be found to finance the resources Student Association President and Vice President only in roles for a guaranteed one year and maximum two years Lecturers are distanced from basic guidance tasks and will not have enough basic information about the students and training on how to deal with students with additional support needs. Positive destinations are not given enough credit by government All staff may not be aware of support and able to signpost students correctly Formal contact between student and support team needs to be more proactive and frequent Communication could be stronger and more effective between internal teams No follow up support after college programme has ended There is no formal process to gradually decrease support in preparation for student to go on to university or employment West Lothian College is identified as a hub to be able



<p>questionnaires and the fact that they are sabbatical students gives them understanding of what the student experience is like</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback from the questionnaires is directed to management and actioned • The basic need of students are catered for, for example free soup, toiletries etc • There are various different methods of support, for example one to one, group sessions etc • Managers are involved in all aspects of support for the students • Support and guidance is driven by student success, not by financial considerations • The Student Association are strong, motivated and professional, well organised and well informed • The Student Association Development Officer provides continuity, has an overview of activities and is well informed • The Student Association is independent from the college management as the student's voice • Induction is broken up over several days so that students don't get too much information at once • Employer involvement in course development and work experience breaks down barriers between employers and students as potential employees • Support and guidance is not dependent only on certain people but mainstreamed across the whole organisation • Students are all made to feel included and welcomed • There is a flexible and adaptable approach to the support structure within the college • Students experience the security of being taken care off throughout the whole study process • Support and guidance as a core strategy of the whole college makes sure that it is given the necessary importance and resources • Information for students is visible through campaigns and posters everywhere on campus • The Student Association create direct feedback from the students and therefore continuously improve the full guidance system 	<p>to provide support to students and may get increasing demand for support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not all students are aware of support opportunities for example, the modern apprentices • Not all students will take part in surveys • No formal process for support team to collaborate with lecturers, not proactive enough, more reactive • Infrastructure missing for sharing knowledge and best practice between lecturers, students and support team • Too much support may result in students not being independent enough for industry/university
<p>Opportunities</p>	<p>Threats</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People with low income/funding issues, physical or mental ill health and other learning support needs have the opportunity to become students and gain a qualification • Offer students a follow up after the initial induction to ensure understanding of signposting and to ensure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No specific way of measuring impact of support activities – can support be linked to student success • How do you determine if your process is successful – are there sufficient methods of measuring success • Not all students are comfortable in asking for support because of social stigma

<p>easy access to information.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching staff could focus on teaching only, with no overlap with support areas • The wider community could benefit from the support available • There could be increased involvement with employer engagement allows good support to the students as the workplace can be advised of any issues for the student when they are placed (in agreement with the student) • Business opportunities could be maximised by making services that complement the learning available to the public, for example mechanics fixing the cars of real customers. The College must take overall responsibility at point of retail • There should be greater support for students in developing their CVs, application skills, interview skills and generally helping students into employment • Set up formal infrastructure to regularly involve students and the support team to keep their profile high with the students, for example develop a 'support app' (e.g. by IT students) for students so they can input their issues and be guided to the right person for support and highlight activities • Issues identified in 'Sparkle' could be used to highlight professional development opportunities for staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there enough consistent access to external support services for students and do the service providers have enough time to invest in individuals • A financial imbalance between guidance and vocational spending might result in a lower vocational skillset • Data protection and privacy, if not handled correctly, might be an issue in preventing the sharing of student support requirements with external agencies • College budgets are dependent on Governmental funds and changes in Government priorities may reduce available finance • Professionalisation of Student Association support work might lead to less enthusiasm and enrolment in the lead roles • Wider community issues ie home situation, poverty and homelessness may affect student engagement • Lecturers disengaged from the support process may not recognise the need to refer students for support
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Reflection and awareness on possible weaknesses and threats

In the preceding SWOT analysis an overview was given of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of the West Lothian College integrated system of support. In the following section, the strengths and opportunities are integrated in a Step-By-Step Implementation plan which can be used in implementing all or parts of the system. However, in doing so, it is important to be aware of the weaknesses and threats West Lothian College faces in implementing this guidance and support system. Therefore, in the following paragraph a reflection can be found on the main and most important potential weaknesses and threats based on the results of the SWOT-analysis. This reflection serves to inform potential users of some vital basic steps to put in place when considering implementation of all or part of the West Lothian College integrated system of support.

1. Recruit people with appropriate qualifications and develop existing staff by providing development opportunities.
2. Allocate sufficient resources needed to implement and sustain the envisaged system both internally and externally.
3. Assign a professional College employee responsible for guiding and supporting the Student Association who have democratically elected President and Vice President.



4. Ensure lecturers have basic knowledge of the guidance system and student's additional needs requirements, and keep involved throughout the learner's journey.
5. Try to involve and influence local and national decision makers including external (healthcare and employers) organisations and political influencers.
6. Encourage the ongoing contact between the student and support team including the lecturer where appropriate.
7. Develop and implement a formal communication and promotion plan.
8. Ensure students are prepared for moving on from College and where to access further support once College has ended (warm transfer).
9. Develop and implement a process for monitoring and evaluating the guidance and support system.
10. Easy access to support system by taking social stigma in to account.
11. Make surveys and information easily accessible; use Apps and gamification to appeal to students.
12. Induction should be broken up over several days.
13. Ensure user friendly processes are implemented for all to understand.
14. Remember data protection responsibilities and use the principle of privacy by default.

RECOMMENDATION FOR STEP BY STEP IMPLEMENTATION

The following recommendations can be used when implementation of all or parts of the West Lothian College student support system is considered.

- Identify the needs of an intensive guidance and support system.
- Guarantee the support of management for the support process.
- Create a plan to define the learner journey to include targets, finances, planning.
- Identify and find the resources – financial and human.
- Team is formed to work collaboratively and are all very approachable and accessible to the students so they feel welcome.
- Identify, contact and inform the networks internally and externally (for example employers) who will support the learner journey, engaging them in a partnership approach.
- Develop the most appropriate tools that will be used proactively to support the students and to share information with staff.
- At the start of the academic year, promote to students to enable it to be embedded throughout their college experience and inform the students of the guidance support in place.
- Management must be involved in all aspects of support for the students and should promote the support activities.

The following recommendations are specific to particular areas of the support system.

Induction

- Ensure a follow up induction is frequently offered.
- Ensure that the students feel welcome, well treated and well supported.
- Induction should be broken up over several days.

Student Association

- Student Association should be independent, professional, well organised, well informed and motivated.
- Management must commit to act on feedback generated by student surveys.
- Assign a professional College employee responsible for guiding and supporting the Student Association who is able to act independently from management.
- Gather direct feedback from the students and therefore continuously improve the full guidance system.

Recharge Model

- Ensure that the students have access to basic necessities such as food, hygiene products and financial resources.
- Promotion of student success stories.

Student Support Team

- Ensure that assessment of student's support needs is diagnosed and support plan in place as soon as possible.
- Ensure that support team members are appropriately qualified to support the varying needs of each student and are signposted to external experts when necessary (financial, mental health, social, addiction etc).
- Ensure that different approaches are available to students according to their needs, such as one to one, class groups, equipment etc.
- Ensure all students are aware of the support available and have the opportunity to disclose their needs at any point during the academic year, such as application form, during interview, enrolment, induction etc.
- Ensure that the student support process and toolkit is clearly defined, checked and evaluated and is in use by all staff.
- Ensure that opportunities for students to engage with the Student Support Team at every stage in their learning journey are transparent and well-advertised.
- Offer students a follow up after the initial induction to ensure understanding of signposting and to ensure easy access to information.

EVALUATION

After analysis of the West Lothian College integrated support system the following conclusions can be drawn:

Advantages:

The system allows students with social, financial, learning and/or health difficulties to access various flexible methods of support not only from the start of their learning journey but at any point along the way, should their circumstances change. It is a well-advertised system and allows those who might normally hesitate to enrol in further or higher education to access learning, improve their skills levels and make positive life changes which also impact positively on their families and the wider community.

The system also engages trained experts to support the students, which allows the lecturing staff to concentrate on high quality delivery and assessment of the learning programmes.

Disadvantages:

The system requires engagement from senior levels of management in order to allocate appropriate resources and funding; however there is no guarantee that the students attracted by the high levels of support will actually be able to successfully complete their learning programmes. This may have a negative impact on the amount of funding that an organisation is able to claim from government or other sources, and the organisation may struggle to sustain required levels of learner success.

Tips for implementation:

Create a plan to define the learner journey to include targets, finances, planning and resources, and only proceed if the support of management for the support process can be guaranteed.

APPENDICES

1. Agenda and Minutes 2nd QMS4VET project week
2. West Lothian College presentations