

## Modelling Foundation Learning: a provider's experience

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**PETA Ltd** – A Foundation Learning programme using qualifications at entry level and level 1 of the QCF, that motivated students and gave them the assurance that they could go on to Level 2 studies at college if they performed well.

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For its first Foundation Learning programme, which offered a vocational qualification in construction, PETA entered into partnership with a local FE college for the programme's hands-on vocational elements. As it turned out, this cooperation went further than originally envisaged, to the benefit of both providers and their students.

### Provider profile

PETA Ltd is a non-profit organisation which has delivered training services for nearly 40 years. It has three training centres, in Winchester, Havant and Portsmouth. The work-based learning provision PETA offers includes engineering and business apprenticeships and Entry to Employment (E2E).

### Curriculum model

PETA's new Foundation Learning offer was launched at its Portsmouth training centre in November 2008. The aim of the 30-week programme was to provide 16- to 18-year-olds **not in education, employment or training (NEET)** with Level 1 training that would enable them to progress to one of the following:

- a Level 2 qualification
- skilled work
- apprenticeship.

The learning was structured around the following **qualifications**:

- subject/vocational knowledge – OCNW<sup>1</sup> Level 1 Certificate in Preparation for Employment in the Construction Industry<sup>2</sup>
- functional skills – NCFE ICT Entry 3,<sup>3</sup> City and Guilds Mathematics Level 1, NCFE English Level 1
- personal and social development (PSD) – Drug Awareness (single unit), Employment Skills.<sup>4</sup>

Having recognised that to deliver this programme PETA would need to commission external provision, PETA's E2E manager had to present a business case to his director and have his proposal authorised by the charity's executive council. On gaining this, he then reached an agreement with Highbury College in Portsmouth for it to provide the **hands-on vocational element** of this programme. Highbury has also provided the quality assurance for the theory-based elements which were facilitated by PETA staff.

The majority of the 17 taught hours per week were spent at PETA, covering functional skills and other topics like money management and healthy living (drug awareness and personal health and hygiene, which covered criteria in the health and safety units of the vocational award).

A half-day each week was spent at Highbury College, where students learnt the practical side of three trades specifically chosen for their maximum employment and earnings potential: brickwork, plastering and tiling. Ten weeks were spent on each trade, with a final practical assessment at the end of that time. For example, the assessed task at the end of the brickwork segment was building a brick arch.

The afternoons of these days were then spent back at PETA for the theory related to the trade, **embedding functional skills**. For example:

- recording the technical language, tools, materials and equipment used
- describing what they had done, in words and photos
- writing up health and safety measures taken.

When writing the scheme of work and creating the lesson plans to support the practical sessions, PETA was aware that lessons without real relevance could lose the students' interest. It was found that recognising and supporting students' aspirations to being their own boss motivated the students to succeed. Mathematics and IT skills were developed by activities such as measuring areas and volumes, estimating quantities of materials, preparing quotations and keeping records for the tax man. And they worked on their English because they recognised that if they could not communicate effectively with potential clients they would not be able to earn a living.

As part of functional skills English, spelling tests were a weekly feature which helped develop technical language and spelling competence. These tests were competitive; if students made no spelling errors in their written work they didn't have to do that day's test!

From the outset of this learning programme the students were encouraged to perform well by a pledge from the curriculum coordinator at Highbury College. He promised places on Level 2 Diploma courses the following September to all successful completers of this learning programme. There were some provisos, as they also had:

- to achieve at least 80% attendance
- to achieve a good disciplinary record
- to complete the College' application process, including course interviews.

1

OCNW is now known as Ascentis

2

Level 1 QCF Certificate 50040339; note that PCD units are available within this qualification

3

ICT Entry level 10064710, mathematics Level 1 QCF Award 50024139, English Level 1 QCF Award 50027372

4

NCFE VRQ Level 1 Certificate in Employment Skills 10011882 – PETA map to NOCN progression Awards at Level 1

## Recruitment and induction

This offer was marketed under PETA's 'MyPOD' (my personal opportunities for development) banner that the provider uses to recruit E2E learners. PETA publicises its services in a wide range of ways, including through:

- close working with Connexions (each of its centres has its own Connexions personal adviser)
- flyers and leaflets targeting potential learners and employers who may be able to offer work placement opportunities
- a regular feature in 'ParkLife', a community newspaper serving the largest housing estate in the catchment area.

A high level of initial interest raised concerns about oversubscription, but early starts and a realisation of the commitment required brought the actual size of the cohort down to 12 young people aged 16 to 18 years, which reduced to ten in the first fortnight. Eight students completed the learning programme.

The students underwent a six-week induction. This covered assessment of their existing skills, diagnostics, **Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)**, and identification of their aspirations.

## Personalisation and progress-tracking

The students kept a **personal portfolio of evidence**, including photographs of work they had done, with tick sheets at the front to record progress against study units. These fed into the computerised records PETA maintained. Every teaching session included a period at the end for one-to-one support, if needed.

Each student was **assigned a mentor** in the first week, a tutor not involved in their actual teaching. This person's role included:

- looking after the student's welfare and personal issues
- providing a point of contact for IAG
- meeting at least once each four-weekly period on a one-to-one basis and being available for informal consultation outside these times
- monitoring individual learner progress towards mutually agreed targets
- referring matters to teaching staff should the need arise
- being involved in students' **four-weekly reviews** with teaching staff
- supporting progression plans and applications.

PETA cites the example of a student with a history of vehicle crime whose mentor went the extra mile to ensure he was given the opportunity of progression regardless of his past. This mentor helped the student stay focused on his learning, and supported his college application, providing a strong case for him to be accepted. The student has secured a place on a Level 2 course at Highbury College.

Work experience was not an element of this first Foundation Learning offer, although PETA usually make this part of its vocational programmes. The reasoning behind this was that the students were going out to Highbury for practical sessions, and PETA did not want to interrupt their learning further. However, some students organised their own placements, which they fitted around their studies.

## Outcomes

The successful outcomes from this programme were:

- ten students completed the first unit: bricklaying
- nine students completed the second unit: plastering
- eight students completed the third unit: tiling
- all PSD units were completed
- five students are going on to Level 2 courses in September
- two students have moved into work.

Because PETA operates year-round, its involvement with some of these students did not end when the programme did. Those going on to Level 2 in September are carrying on their functional skills studies over the summer. This supports them to stay in the habit of studying.

## The future

PETA has used lessons learnt from its first Foundation Learning offer to make some changes to this learning programme for 2009/10:

- There will be two cohorts of 12 per annum.
- Work placements will be added to the programme, and will be organised at around week six.
- Construction will be delivered over 15 weeks, embedding functional skills.
- Students will focus on stand-alone functional skills from weeks 15 to 22.
- The following weeks will feature embedded functional skills (where necessary) and assessments, and work placements.

To provide work experience for future cohorts, PETA plans to introduce a new initiative, 'PETA has 100 pairs of hands'. This will offer voluntary and community groups the opportunity to put its construction and other learners to work, for example improving community gardens, working on environmental projects, etc.

This provider also plans to expand its Foundation Learning offer at Level 1 across all its learning centres, so that from September 2009, 30 per cent of new starts will be on a Foundation Learning programme and by September 2010, all new starts will be.

The following vocational areas will be offered for 2009/10:

- motor vehicle
- radio production
- business administration
- construction
- introduction to care
- electrical installation.

The doubling of the number of starts in construction and the introduction of the motor vehicle, care and business administration strands reflect how successful PETA's relationship with Highbury has been and how it has been encouraged to extend its collaborative partnerships.

## Challenges

At the start of this programme, there was only one QCF accredited construction qualification available but PETA designed its offer to meet that qualification's requirements.

PETA promotes the Foundation Learning route to potential students and employers, but the charity feels that a national campaign is needed to market it to young people, parents, businesses and IAG providers. In construction, the industry-accepted standard is still City and Guilds.

## Benefits

- Students receive **national recognition for what they do**, and the QCF qualifications recognise things that hadn't been recognised before.
- PETA felt that the vocational qualification in this programme was fantastic, and encouraged **partnership working** with an FE college and the creation of interactive resources.
- PETA's E2E manager at Portsmouth has himself benefited from the introduction of Foundation Learning in terms of **personal and professional development**. His experiences in the design and delivery of this programme, and his enthusiasm for Foundation Learning personalised learning programmes, have led him to go out and deliver presentations about it to others. He has also recently studied for his Certificate of Education, the project work for which was on Foundation Learning using qualifications at entry level and level 1 of the QCF.

'We, as providers, are being given an opportunity to develop a series of learning programmes which can be as exciting and practical as we want to make them. The only obstacles are those which we put in our own way.'

**Kevin Wayne-Morris**

## Further information

For further information please contact  
**Kevan Wayne-Morris**,  
E2E Manager,  
at: [kwayne-morris@peta.co.uk](mailto:kwayne-morris@peta.co.uk)  
[peta.co.uk](http://peta.co.uk)  
[www.peta.co.uk](http://www.peta.co.uk)