

**A report to the LSC on the second phase of a project to  
evaluate the impact of OCN and OCNW provision**

**Stephen Cullen  
Russell Moseley  
Stephen Hill**

**Centre for Lifelong Learning  
University of Warwick**

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## 1. Introduction

This is a report on the second phase of a project designed to assess the impact of a specific unit-based credit framework as developed through provision accredited by OCNs and the Open College Network of the North West (OCNW). The first phase focused on four broad themes: the role of OCN-accredited provision in widening participation, increasing flexibility, facilitating progression and ensuring quality. It made use of a widely distributed questionnaire through which the views of users of OCN provision were sought and concluded that, with respect to all four of the themes we set out to explore, OCN provision makes a significant contribution to each. At the same time we proposed that it would be helpful to undertake further work making use of selected case studies to test these conclusions, to provide specific examples of ways in which OCN provision was responsive and to explore, for example, some of the issues associated with progression which had proved difficult to address on a quantitative basis in the first phase.

## 2. The choice of case studies

Given the enormous variety of OCN provision which the first phase of the project revealed, and the diversity of contexts – social, cultural, organisational and institutional - within which it took place, it was clearly impossible to identify a manageable number of case studies which could claim in any way to be representative of the whole. Instead, we focused on uses of OCN provision which had emerged from the questionnaire phase of the project and which were considered to be of particular interest, on case studies in Wales and Northern Ireland as well as England, and on areas that were of interest to the project funders – all with a view to illustrating the diversity of ways in which OCN provision had been developed.

We consciously avoided choosing the best known or most high profile examples of the use of OCN provision. For example, its use in the context of an FE college's credit framework was one potential case study that was identified at an early stage, but rather than opting to look at Newham College, which has been extensively examined elsewhere, we chose an equally interesting but in some ways much more typical college setting. In fact this case study along with that of Craven College (which enabled us to look at OCNW provision), were the only two studies which focused on provision in colleges despite the overall concentration of OCN provision in that setting. Instead, we believed it would be more useful to reflect the diversity of organisations and the contexts within which they deliver OCN provision by identifying examples from the voluntary and community sector, statutory bodies, the public sector, and private training providers (as well as others that frankly prove impossible to categorise).

In some cases we were unable to undertake the case studies we had identified. On several occasions a key individual had moved on since the first phase of the project, reflecting the difficult circumstances within which much of this work is delivered. Sometimes the organisation was unwilling or unable to make the time to be interviewed and to provide background information; sometimes contacts felt uncomfortable about their organisation featuring as a case study (despite

reassurances); one organisation was willing to be interviewed but wished to remain anonymous.

But one area we had hoped to look at proved particularly frustrating. The use of OCN provision with refugees and asylum seekers had featured in a number of questionnaires returned in phase 1 of the project, and these revealed some interesting examples of work, with very positive outcomes, in a range of settings including colleges, LEAs and voluntary organisations. However, after 31 December 2004, the NOCN ESOL qualification was given proxy status with the result that much of this work was no longer funded by local LSCs. What was particularly striking about this work, and the reason we wanted to include it as a case study, was the way in which the OCN 'bite size' approach to learning was perfectly suited to these learners. We were constantly told that the attraction of the provision was that individual units could be taken, 'Listening' and 'Speak to communicate' for example, giving learners the confidence to build up credit towards the full qualification, without having to commit to a longer programme of study at the outset - which, on the basis of experience, they would not be willing to do. Indeed, we were given striking examples of the way in which ESOL learners were often unable to complete a full qualification even if that was what they wished to do: in one case in the south west substantial numbers of learners working in the fishing industry were simply moved *en masse* by their employer to an east coast port, part way through their course. The upshot of all this, and the technical funding details are well known to LSC colleagues and do not need repeating here, is that in order to access funding, providers have been forced to abandon highly regarded OCN provision for qualifications that are seen as less appropriate for the learners in question. Given the clear evidence of success enjoyed by this provision in the past (precisely because of its accredited, unit-based character), it does appear to us to be unfortunate (to say the least) that those who most wish to sustain this work have had to turn to other, less suitable, qualifications.

## Discussion

For the most part the individual case studies speak for themselves and collectively they support the conclusions that were drawn from the project's earlier phase – that OCN unit based, credit bearing provision, through its inherent flexibility, makes a real contribution in terms of widening participation and progression without sacrificing quality. The last of these has been the subject of a separate piece of work which looked specifically at quality assurance arrangements for OCN provision.. The case studies revealed no particular concerns in this respect, and they provided several examples of effective quality *enhancement* through the support and contribution of OCN staff operating at a local level.

The opportunity to look more closely at progression provided further evidence of the difficulty of capturing this using purely quantitative measures, and emphasised the myriad ways in which learners exploit opportunities to move forward – and although 'forward' does involve linear progression through successive levels of provision, often the pattern is far more complex. One of the striking features of the case studies was the way in which provision developed for a quite specific purpose could lead to a marked diversity of outcomes in terms of progression as broadly defined. Thus some courses devised for a particular workplace setting, with a quite specific vocational end in view, enabled learners not only to progress within that occupational context but allowed others to progress, for example, to further or higher education. In many

ways the diversity of progression routes from OCN provision is a reflection of its inherent flexibility. In the same way, several of the case studies illustrated how provision designed for a particular group of learners could be adopted (and adapted) equally successfully by others. Case studies based in Wales demonstrated hopes that location of the units within the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales would be a helpful mechanism for securing credibility for OCN-accredited provision.

Overall, the case studies suggest that this unit-based, credit bearing provision demonstrates fitness for purpose for a very wide range of learners in a diverse set of contexts. It would be an enormous loss if the robustness of this work was undermined by an increasing fragility brought about by problems of funding – something we encountered in a number of the case studies.

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## **SECTION A OCN accredited provision as the basis for credit frameworks**

### **1 North Warwickshire and Hinckley College**

#### **Introduction**

The College began to construct its credit framework in 1997 building on established OCN provision which had been developed over several years, often to support community delivery. The benefits of OCN accredited provision were, therefore, well known, especially in terms of its potential to attract 'hard to reach' adult learners by engaging others in learning in small, manageable units. The widening participation potential of OCN provision, because of its flexibility, was widely recognised in the College, and the decision to build on this work and to create a coherent credit framework reflected the wish to identify pathways and to enhance progression opportunities for those learners who were initially attracted by the 'bite size' character of the units on offer.

#### **Flexibility**

The framework is a matrix organised by levels and subject areas. Learners can move both vertically and horizontally through it and may choose to study a range of subjects, particularly at the lower levels before progressing to levels 2 and 3 in a single subject area. Each unit of learning has a set of learning outcomes, assessment criteria, progression opportunities and fits within a subject pathway. Learners are assessed against the criteria using a range of methods appropriate to them and the programme. These methods include the traditional portfolio and multi choice questionnaires along with more imaginative group activities, video presentations, show and exhibition work.

When it was launched the credit framework offered over 150, 20-hour units of learning at entry level to level 3. The curriculum was mostly drawn from humanities, languages, health and social care and essential skills (including ESOL) but as the framework developed units of OCN accredited learning could increasingly be found in all areas of the College's work. These units underpin vocational offers, provide a variety of entry and exit points and support smooth progression. As the framework developed it began to highlight gaps in provision, stimulating creation of programmes from entry level to level 3 across almost all subject areas. As a result the structure has been able to provide:

- links to and from programmes accredited by other bodies, mostly full-year, high study hour programmes
- opportunities to accredit specialist provision to be offered either independently or in large vocational programmes
- accreditation of pre-entry programmes in the essential skills curriculum
- support for the delivery of work based learning, providing short accredited programmes to meet the needs of employers, and pathways to assist work based learners to progress
- links from short ten hour programmes at a variety of levels and across the curriculum to provide gateways for new learners

- additional study attached to full time 16 – 18 provision to provide learners with a competitive advantage in gaining their first experience of work

The number of units in the credit framework increased steadily until by 2002/03 over 1,100 units were available for use, some of which had been specifically written by college staff to support the work of learners in a variety of settings. At that point the framework was reviewed and rationalised, resulting in a total of around 600 units today. The number of units being studied by learners has grown from around 3,000 when the credit framework was introduced to almost 20,000.

### **Progression**

The credit framework has been successful in attracting students, in retaining them (retention and success rates are high) and in providing opportunities for progression.

‘Our experience has shown that learners enjoy and appreciate the opportunity to learn in small blocks and achieve success. This is particularly so for learners who face challenges. Our work with communities which may be disadvantaged for a range of reasons evidences the success of an offer that provides opportunities to move in and out, pick up skills and knowledge and therefore achieve continuing success.’

Quantifying progression is not straightforward given the number of units in the framework, the number of learners accessing them, and the fact (as we pointed out in phase 1 of this project) that progression, especially in the case of adults, is very often not linear through successive levels of achievement. Tracking of students continues to present challenges in terms of processes and systems.

### **Quality**

Quality assurance for the credit framework has not been especially problematic. When the framework was rationalised in 2003/04 the opportunity was taken also to review the moderation arrangements. As a result the framework now operates with a small number of internal moderators, each having responsibility for a group of subjects, providing an agreed moderation service for all assessors within their group and working with a chief internal moderator and the external role of the OCN in helping to ensure the success of the framework - not just in terms of quality but more widely - has been crucial, and the College sees the partnership with the Network as a key element in bringing about that success. Other critical factors the College has identified include the need to keep the framework as clear and simple as possible, to use a common system of documentation, to encourage ‘champions’ to enthuse other staff, to develop robust tracking systems, and, above, all to give a high priority to staff development:

‘Staff training is key to the success of the framework. The initial group of committed staff who led the development of the framework and preached the ‘gospel of credit based learning’ provided extensive initial and ongoing support to staff. Many of their ‘converts’ now provide

support to staff new to credit based learning, and more full time staff are now involved in teaching units from the framework particularly at the higher levels. It is essential to ensure that all new staff receive an induction into the use of the framework, assessment and moderation.'

The impact of the framework on the College has been considerable. It has helped to keep its offer 'vibrant' and responsive, and it has provided staff with an opportunity to widen their portfolios and to think outside the standard model of full qualifications delivered through traditional modes.

## 2 The Adult Learners' Framework

### Introduction

The Adult Learners' Framework (ALF) is a partnership of statutory, voluntary and community providers in Bristol, Bath, North and East Somerset and South Gloucestershire. It has its origins in a joint HEFCE/LSC funded widening participation project which ran between 2001 and 2003, and which was led by Bristol College with a strong Connexions involvement. Although the focus of the project was on progression to HE, discussions on broadening its basis to encompass a range of progression opportunities led eventually to the creation of ALF. LSC funding was made available for progression through lower levels and to build links with community and voluntary organisations. When Western Region OCN was formed (from the merger of two existing OCNs) it took on the management of the framework.

The framework makes use of a bank of OCN units of assessment which have been approved for delivery in ALF, the aim of which is 'to create a framework and infrastructure that allows learners to start on a learning programme with the confidence that, wherever it takes place, there are clear accessible pathways and progression opportunities'.

ALF's primary objectives are:

- to encourage learning providers and employers from the public, private and voluntary sectors to adopt and value achievement ... giving learners confidence in their ability to progress the currency of their achievements
- to develop a local credit framework following national standards and guidelines
- to provide participants with recognised credits for units of study
- to provide clear information to learners and potential learners on all levels, credit value and progression routes
- and to encourage and facilitate participants' progression to employment, community action and further study, including higher education.

### Flexibility

The flexibility offered by a unit based, credit bearing system lies at the heart of the framework. Tutors delivering units stressed the importance of this flexibility in terms of the capacity to tailor courses to the needs of particular groups of students and to offer 'small chunks of learning'. For those working with widening participation target groups, the recent decision to increase flexibility through the introduction of 10 hour units of credit was especially welcome and has been successfully put to use in the essential skills area in a range of contexts including prisons and the probation service, and family learning. The freedom to make use of a range of approaches to assessment is widely recognised as a key positive feature, and the capacity to build portfolios of evidence of learning is seen as especially significant, again for the hardest to reach learners in particular.

## **Widening Participation**

The framework has succeeded in attracting significant numbers of learners from widening participation target groups, largely through a focus on learning in the community. Bristol Community Education OCN courses, for example, are delivered mainly in nurseries and primary schools which provide an accessible and non-threatening environment. Learners' participation in these cases often reflects a wish to support their children - a clear positive rather than deficiency model. Similarly, locally based courses involving research and consultation in the community motivate participants through the investigation of local issues, with the result that they may achieve some change in their community, at the same time receiving OCN credits to recognise their learning. The 10 hour units referred to above are expected to make a further contribution to widening participation. As an indicator of the success of ALF in their regard, in 2003/04 1,158 learners achieved credit at entry level and over 3,000 at level 1.

## **Progression**

Although it has only been in existence for a short time there is already evidence of learners following a number of progression pathways. In some subject areas - modern languages and art, craft and design for example - learners work through progressive levels in a linear fashion. In other cases the framework is used to encourage progression to a full level 2 qualification: the Park Vocational project in South Bristol, for example, works with young people who are not yet ready to embark on GNVQ/AVC or NVQ courses in an area with poor school staying on rates and achievement. The OCN units in the framework provide the students with skills for life, basic skills and key skills as well as offering a range of units in construction, woodworking, painting and decorating, beauty therapy and performing arts. In this way students can gain confidence with evidencing and portfolio building skills and be prepared for progression to an NQF qualification or to work. Similarly, participants on family learning courses progress to courses within the NQF, including NVQ courses in childcare and courses for crèche workers and lunchtime assistants. Again, use is made of a specially designed unit within the framework which enables learners to acquire the skills and confidence they need to move on.

Given its origins it is not surprising that the framework also has a strong progression to higher education dimension. The ALF Progression to HE Certificate has been developed so that learners can accumulate credit by studying with any of the ALF providers, including credit gained for work undertaken at community venues. The University of the West of England recognises this for the offer of guaranteed places on a range of degree courses provided that the learner has achieved specific credits related to their chosen degree courses. At the time of this case study, fourteen ALF learners had expressed an interest in following the new Certificate.

## **Quality**

Interestingly, the arrangements for QA within ALF (which are the responsibility of Western Region OCN) are very similar to those proposed within NOCN's CQF. The fact that they appear to be working well in the context of ALF is encouraging. One tutor characterised recent changes in the approach to QA as both 'less bureaucratic' and 'more rigorous' - not a combination that is encountered all that frequently.

The diversity of partners in the framework does not seem to have caused any particular difficulties: before becoming accepted as full members of ALF, would-be partners are required to submit their QA policies and procedures to WROCN which then undertakes a quality audit. Annual sampling of individual courses is undertaken to ensure that systems are effective and working in practice. Standardisation is of particular importance given the range of partners delivering OCN units, and the first round of meetings was felt to be of benefit not simply in terms of confirming the existence of common standards across the partnership but also in providing an opportunity for the exchange of good practice, the sharing of common challenges and the identification of potential new developments. As with the North Warwickshire and Hinckley College credit framework, the importance of staff training and development is seen as essential for the framework to function effectively - indeed, all the more so given the range of ALF partners and their different cultures and practices.

## **SECTION B: OCN PROVISION WITH INDIVIDUAL PROVIDERS**

### **NOCN Provision in Prisons**

#### **'Families for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century', Safe Ground, Battersea**

##### **Introduction**

Antonia Rubinstein, of Safe Ground, Battersea, was interviewed on 19<sup>th</sup> April, 2005. Safe Ground was founded in 1995 as a charity using drama to motivate and engage disaffected prisoners. Safe Ground is:

'A charity that works predominantly in prisons [...] and we use drama to motivate and engage disaffected people to find a way of contributing more constructively to society. We use drama to enable the prisoners to communicate in a way that will enable an audience to take them seriously and view them in a new light'.

Classic literature, drama, and design were used to enable prisoners to view learning in a new light, and to 'build bridges'. The success of the first programme, initially run at HMP Feltham, led prisoners from four prisons to approach Safe Ground in 1997 to ask if it could run a programme, using drama-based education, to help prisoners improve their relationships with their children, and help break the cycle of crime. Safe Ground was also approached by the Prison Service, and asked if they could use their techniques to improve parenting education within the prison system. With initial funding from a range of sources including the National Lottery and prison-focused charities, Safe Ground was able to develop their 'Fathers Inside' and 'Family Man' programmes, under the heading of 'Families for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century'. The programmes use drama to deal with parenting and family relationship issues.

Safe Ground was required by the Prison Service to provide accreditation of the scheme, and accreditation is undertaken through NOCN, fulfilling the social and life skills and group and team work criteria. The Fathers Inside project comprises:

- Parent Craft, level 1 (Social and life skills programme)
- Group and Teamwork, level 2 (Social and life skills programme)
- Communication, level 1 (key skills)
- Adult literacy, entry level (adult literacy, core curriculum)

The project was, at first, run in HMPs Woodhill and Wandsworth. The aim was to create a programme that could be duplicated throughout the prison system. A detailed, sophisticated 'tool kit' has been developed for prison teachers by Safe Ground, and it is now in use in 30 prisons. The tool kit for teachers provides instructions about every aspect of preparing for, and running the Fathers Inside project, including, for example, management issues, classroom layout, and key skills. Courses are run on 20 consecutive weekdays, mornings and afternoons, with cell work also being undertaken by learners. The bigger aim of Safe Ground's work is:

'That the quality of prison education will be improved so that we can really give prisoners education that will help them question their behaviour, and, perhaps, adapt it, and use the prison service more effectively in order not to commit crime, or be involved in drugs, or whatever they are doing'.

## Progression

The Fathers Inside programme has three key aims:

- To furnish participants with parenting skills
- To improve their social and life skills, and key skills
- To help with sentence planning, further education and employment

In this context, progression has a number of aspects. Antonia Rubinstein did not make any inflated claims about the capacity of the programme to make anything but incremental differences in, for example, parenting skills among many prisoners. Nonetheless, progression could be dramatic. The Offenders' Learning and Skills Unit (OLSU) website carries the testimony of 'Greg' and his account of the impact on him of taking a Safe Ground course:

'I was serving a three year sentence when I first became aware of the Family Man course run by Safe Ground. They were advertising a course combined with drama and parenting. As I wasn't employed and locked up 23 hours a day, I thought I'd go for it. I had no expectations, and the first few days were strange as we were treated as human beings. The course ran for ten days and at the end we were expected to give a performance for staff and prisoners. We bonded together well as a group. I felt the course helped me to look at my own responsibilities as a parent [...]

After release, 'Greg' was offered, on the strength of his OCN accreditation, a course at Merton College. Unfortunately, '[I] got myself back into trouble and had to spend another 70 days in Wandsworth', but, on release he took up the place at Merton College, and, from there obtained education and drama-related work. He commented:

'I would like to express what I feel I've achieved since being involved with Safe Ground. My life was just in and out of prison with no direction and no belief in myself or my abilities. I was a waster. Safe Ground gave me the chance to test myself. If you'd have said that I would be in the position I am now, I would have laughed – working for the police! I also went to the IVCA awards in Park Lane where we received a Bronze Award for "Blinda" [the prisoner-made introductory video], which I was really over the moon with. I've also had my first ever payslip which I intend to frame. And now I'm on the payroll at Newham council and at Stratford police station. I've also opened my first ever bank account which has really made me feel proud. I've got my first ever council flat, which is now furnished, carpeted and in a lovely part of Roehampton. And I'm now receiving interferon at Kings College for my liver. I've always made a point of staying in contact with Safe Ground as I feel they're part of my support network. And I know they're always at the end of the phone if I feel I need a bit of support'.

This learner experienced progression in personal terms, occupationally, and educationally. Antonia Rubinstein was able to add additional information to this mini-biography, noting that, unfortunately, 'Greg' was back in prison. However, she also explained that 'Greg' was in his early fifties, and had a lifetime of drug and drink problems behind him. While it was true that he was back in prison, it was also true that, as he had written, he had experienced further education, as well as

experiencing, for the first time, personal progression in a number of areas. This was a clear achievement for a disadvantaged, excluded, middle-aged man.

The programme is designed to improve prisoners' social skills, but also their parenting skills, even while they are still serving their sentences. In the latter context, progression could be, for example, represented by a learner following up his participation in a Safe Ground course by writing a letter to his child or children, or setting up a visit, as well as accessing further education opportunities, or employment, both within and, later, without, the prison system. This form of progression was noted in an evaluation of the pilot of Families for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER). That evaluation noted:

'It was established that 18 out of 24 respondents experienced improvements in the frequency of family contact – they were either phoning more often, sending more letters home or receiving more visits. Some prisoners had re-established contact with family members, whilst others were now allowing their children to visit them in prison. Additionally, interviewees suggested the quality of contact had also benefited: for example, some were writing letters with younger readers in mind, including stories, quizzes, drawings, etc'. (Karen Halsey, Mary Ashworth, John Harland, 'Made for Prisoners by prisoners; a summary of NFER's evaluation of the Safe Ground family relationships and parenting programme', September, 2002, p6)

Measures of progression in a prison context are problematic. Although Safe Ground kept records of learners accessing the Fathers Inside programme, no records were kept by Prison Service education of learners' further progression routes. It was, therefore, not possible for any indication to be given of educational progression made by prisoners.

In addition to the NFER evaluation, Safe Ground's programme has been evaluated by the Community and Criminal Justice Research Unit of De Montfort University. The latter evaluation (Gwyneth Boswell, Peter Wedge, and Avril Price, 'The Impact of *Fathers Inside*; an OLSU and Safe Ground Parenting Course for Male Prisoners at HMP Ashwell', De Montfort University, Leicester, June, 2004) presents evidence of the success of the programme in terms of learners' progression routes. With respect to parenting skills, the report's authors noted that:

'About half of [the] respondents provided evidence of notable changes in fathering behaviour, both from prison and after release; the other half provided evidence of minor change. They gave accounts of fathers putting into practice their learning about listening to and talking with their children in visits and telephone calls, playing with them and sharing activities, sending them cards, letters and story tapes. Some also shared their newfound knowledge about child development with their partners (none of whom had ever participated in formal parenting education either). The need to find alternatives to smacking, for example, had impinged on the attitudes of both fathers and some partners. This evidence gives the clear message that **Fathers Inside** promotes learning which has continuous and far-reaching effects on the quality of parent-child relationships even when the father remains in prison'. (Executive Summary, p4)

Other forms of progression were also identified by the evaluators, not least in terms of behaviour in prison, and advantages gleaned by families and society at large:

'In [the view of prison staff] this [the Safe Ground work] often led to improved and more courteous attitudes and behaviour towards staff, which, in turn, produced a more supportive staff and prison culture towards the programme. At its best, this produced an elevated atmosphere surrounding participants' wider educational and other self-development within the prison'. (*ibid*)

One of the evaluation's primary conclusions was:

'If, as the evaluation evidence suggests, the changes in their [the prisoners] behaviour result in a positive experience of parenting for their children, then the work done by **Fathers Inside** may have spared society from potential candidates for a new generation of future damaged and disaffected prisoners'.

### **Flexibility**

Safe Ground's Fathers Inside programme is, to a degree, atypical in terms of most OCN-accredited courses, in that Safe Ground's programme is built around continuous learning on consecutive days. The Prison Service had initially been resistant to Safe Ground's advocacy of a sustained education experience for learners. However, the success of the programme had been convincing, and the intensive approach was seen to be integral to the experience of Fathers Inside.

The more typical OCN approach, of smaller sessions of learning than Safe Ground used, was not believed to be appropriate to the particular situation of disengaged prisoners: Safe Ground was trying to engage the most disengaged, and those most lacking in motivation, and, in consequence, long, sophisticated learning sessions were necessary.

'Another revolutionary [innovation], was that we were advocating a sustained educational experience over, at that point [at the outset] of eight days. And most of the social and life skills programmes, at that point, were developed on a roll-on, roll-off programme, over ten or 12 weeks. It was radical because it was morning and afternoon as well, it wasn't just morning.'

### **Widening participation**

Safe Ground has made considerable efforts to widen participation in their programme within the prison system. The key issue was:

'How to you engage the most resistant learners – that was the challenge!'  
And I really don't think that a lot of people who are working in education are really getting to grips with that'.

The De Montfort evaluation reinforced Antonia Rubinstein's view that the main issue in terms of participation was 'to engage the most resistant learners', it commented on the learners:

'In general, and in common with the majority of the prison population, their profile was not one which promised positive engagement with prison education programmes'. (Executive Summary, p2)

The Safe Ground programme is open to all male prisoners (with the exception of sex offenders and juveniles), but Safe Ground were aware at the outset that it would be necessary to market their programme – 'to engage the most resistant learners'. Research was carried out among prisoners to discover what the prisoners felt would make the programme most attractive. A team of prisoners was formed in one prison to develop the marketing strategy. The research indicated that for an education programme to be successful it had to have status among the prisoners, it had to have a clear outcome, and that learners had to be treated as adult learners. Interestingly, one aspect of status was seen to be the 'branding' of the product, in much the same way as training shoes, or any other product, are branded in the market place. In response to these findings, Safe Ground developed a clearly branded product, with identifying logo, colours, and accessories, such as T-shirts. In addition, the programme was advertised by posters in prisons. These posters, and course folders, featured the names of prisoners who had participated in the production, trials, and revision of the Family Man and Fathers Inside programmes, and the tagline adopted, and stressed, was that the courses were 'developed by prisoners for prisoners'. The formal marketing of Safe Ground's programme and its successful branding was matched by word of mouth recommendations among prisoners. The courses acquired the status that was necessary for them to engage a very wide range of prisoners. As a result, in most prisons where the programme operates, there is a waiting list for acceptance onto the scheme.

The De Monfort evaluation concluded that:

'The drama-based and experiential nature of this learning [...] appears to raise levels of confidence of groups of men, many of whom may previously have had only negative experiences of education and no experience of educational achievement. It spurs some of them to continue achieving and it inculcates in them an ability to reflect, possibly for the first time, on how others are feeling'. (Executive Summary, p7)

### **Quality and quality assurance**

The Families for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century project is the result of an extended, and sophisticated, process of planning and development. Teams of prisoners were involved, from the outset, in the development of the finished product. The prisoners at one prison helped develop the drama and introductory video aspects of the programme, while another group undertook marketing research among fellow inmates, and a third group trialled the product. This was followed by the piloting of the project in 14 different prisons. The pilot was evaluated by NFER, and received a positive evaluation, concluding:

'The two courses were generally highly regarded both by teachers and participants. The courses owed much of their success to the project's evolutionary history – they rose out of the ideas and experiences of prisoners. The resulting materials were subsequently well received by participants, who saw them as relevant, credible and easy to relate to. This in turn contributed to the overall impact of the programme and men were prompted to change

their behaviour, or at least question their attitudes to parenting'. (Halsey *et al*, *op cit*, p14)

Safe Ground have continued to refine the programme, and considerable effort has gone into 'mapping' the courses. Prison teachers involved with delivering the Safe Ground material are provided with detailed guides, outlining all aspects of course delivery. In addition, learners are provided with high-quality course material, including detailed course books, portfolio, and an information booklet. Safe Ground has established and maintained high standards of quality, confirmed by the evaluations carried out by NFER and De Montfort University.

**'Flying Start Parent Project'**  
**Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB)**  
**The provider perspective**

**Introduction**

Clare Watson, the BELB Reading Recovery Officer, was interviewed on 10 March 2005. A former early years primary school teacher, she has been in charge of reading recovery for Belfast primary school children for 12 years. In addition, for the last ten years she has run the Flying Start Parent Project, which provides Northern Ireland Open College Network (NIOCN) accredited courses, from level 1 to level 3. Prior to establishing Flying Start, Clare Watson had attended a Better Reading Partnership course in Bradford. She used this experience as a foundation for the Flying Start project in Belfast. Using the Better Reading Partnership model as the basis of her approach to the NIOCN, but 'adapted to our particular needs in Northern Ireland', the Flying Start programme was quickly accredited.

The focus is on involving adults in improving children's reading skills, particularly those children who are in the 'just below average' reading ability band. Parents are recruited, by open enrolment, to the courses by local primary schools, which target new parents in particular. Take-up is variable, within and between schools, but typical learners are young, working-class, full time mothers with few formal educational qualifications. All three Flying Start courses are NIOCN accredited. The Level 1 course is worth three credits, and is 'focused on helping parents to support their own children's early acquisition of reading and writing'. The Level 3 course is worth nine credits, and is aimed at parents, classroom assistants, and local volunteers helping in schools. In addition, all learners receive a BELB certificate, and immediate written feedback on their course work.

**Progression**

The Flying Start programme is part of the BELB's literacy strategy. The aims of the programme are to assist both parents and children. In terms of the desired outcome for children, the aim is to improve children's reading. The desired outcomes for adults are to expose them to quality training, with the aim of producing personally satisfying outcomes, boosting the employability of learners, and encouraging educational progression.

In terms of educational progression, Clare Watson felt that the Flying Start scheme was 'out of the loop' with regard to formal progression from the Flying Start courses to other educational opportunities:

'We are not in a certain loop as regards progression. In other words, if I was in a college of Further Education, I might be making it that part of what I do would be directing people to certain courses. But I have neither the expertise, nor the facility to do that. What we would do in that area is that we would very much encourage people to move forward. We would refer them to FE colleges.'

This issue was recognised at an early stage, and the Flying Start staff made a particular effort to encourage learners to pursue further educational opportunities. This is greatly facilitated by formal and informal contacts between the FE sector and Flying Start. For example, the external moderator for the project is employed in the FE sector, and provides help and guidance on progression:

‘We have tried to make connections. We give people names of people to get in touch with at different local colleges.’

In particular, there has been progression to NVQ level three in classroom training by Flying Start learners, facilitated by the match between the Flying Start portfolio and the requirements of the NVQ. Many Flying Start learners were interested in working in schools, particularly as classroom assistants. This was encouraged, and the links with the FE sector were thoroughly exploited. In addition, networking with a variety of community groups also helped facilitate progression for Flying Start learners.

The other area of greatest interest to learners was progression to ICT courses, and, again, there was progression to further qualifications gained through the FE sector in this area:

‘Anybody who has the target of going back to work, even if it is not in the near future, everybody is very aware of the need to be able to work on computers. So computer courses are very popular. And a lot of these are run by local community groups, they would buy in people to come and work with them.’

This was further facilitated by the good contacts with a network of local community groups. In both these areas – childhood education and ICT – the fact that the Flying Start courses were NIOCN-accredited was significant, and contributed in an effective fashion to educational progression for Flying Start learners.

Finally, at level 3, there was progression to higher education:

‘We also have some people applying for university, who have not gone through the traditional school route.’

### **Unit-based credit framework**

Flying Start courses are all built on the principle of short training and learning sessions. The Level 1 course requires that the learner commit themselves to seven one to one and a half hour sessions. These typically run from 9.15 a.m. on a school day. Although Clare Watson was aware that this tends to militate against employed parents, she argued that the target group for Flying Start consists of those thinking about future progression into employment. Over 400 learners had taken part, and the ‘bite-sized chunks’ approach was seen to be successful. The Level 3 course requires a greater degree of commitment on the part of learners, with a three day training session being followed by one-to-one work with three children over a ten week period. During that time, learners compile an extensive portfolio of work, providing, for example, lesson records, reading records, and child records.

### **Widening Participation**

The Flying Start programme is specifically aimed at drawing in non-traditional learners, and there had been considerable success in this respect, with the ‘typical’ learner being a young, full time mother, with few formal qualifications:

‘A lot of our parents would be, mainly, women, I’d say [...] very often they are parents who are looking after children, they haven’t got jobs, and they really enjoy and relish the opportunity to get out and do something else.’

In response to a further question about the profile of 'typical' learners, Clare Watson replied:

'That is difficult, because I'm only generalising. We do have the whole range, in a sense, but I suppose that the group that would be heavily represented would be young mothers, from working-class areas, maybe who have never been working. Probably they have ill-formed aspirations to get back to work, and I'm generalising here, but there would be quite a sizeable proportion of that ilk.'

The Flying Start programme had two main targets – helping children as part of BELB's overall literacy strategy, and providing benefits for parents:

'Part of it is that you are helping children's reading, but an equal part of it is that you are giving adults quality training, and that, through that, we hope that they themselves will benefit, both personally, and, maybe, widening their horizons, opening other opportunities up to them.'

Given the non-traditional educational backgrounds of many of their learners, Flying Start staff provided as much support as they could. For example, learners were provided with templates and models for their own report-making, with the aim of building up learner skills characterised by transferable skills acquisition. The ethos of Flying Start was to provide as much personal and informal support as possible.

### **Quality**

Providing 'quality training' for adult learners was seen as being at the heart of the programme. The Flying Start courses are moderated by internal and external moderators, who have backgrounds in literacy. Moderation was believed to be thorough, and quality control robust. There was some concern that OCN proposals to move towards moderation by general purpose moderators, rather than moderators specifically tasked to each OCN-accredited course, might lead to some erosion of the value of that moderation. Although Ms Watson was concerned that this would not be apparent to learners, she felt that it might well have an impact on trainers.

**'Flying Start Parent Project'**  
**Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB)**  
**The learner perspective**

Although it was not possible to interview directly any Flying Start learners, two documents provided by Clare Watson contained material on the Flying Start experience. These documents were: Lorna Gardiner, 'Reading Partnership Programme; an evaluation of the impact of the programme in nine SELB primary schools' and 'Flying Start Parent Project; Report, 1998/99'.

All the parents quoted in the two documents were enthusiastic about how their training had improved their ability to assist their children, and other children, in reading. In addition, issues of improved self-confidence, and progression figured in learners' accounts of Flying Start.

A report from the trainer at Whitehouse Primary School noted that:

'All the parents are now interested in doing an English GCSE course which Ann Smyth is running in Rathcoole. I suggested this to two in particular who were showing good writing skills in their book reports. They obviously have a lot of potential and are very capable of further education.' ('Flying Start Parent Project Report')

The internal evaluation of the scheme also drew upon learner testimony to highlight confidence and progression issues:

'Many [students] articulating a desire to continue with the programme or to go on to study at a higher level: "I would think about doing a BA in education now"..."I will be continuing to work with other children now and hope o see them benefiting from the programme"..."I have learned a lot from this course, strategies, prompts, record keeping, but most importantly that reading can be fun and enjoyed by both adult and child"..."I will continue to be a Reading Partner in school and [when] more training became available I would be interested"..."I would think about doing an NVQ or something now"' (Gardiner, p. 6)

These points were reinforced in the conclusion to the evaluation:

'The Reading Partners themselves were vociferous in praise of the programme, particularly in noting the progress which was evident in the target children. Many expressed a desire to continue their involvement in the programme and also a desire to continue with some kind of further study. A further important aspect is the possibility for generalisation, as partners continue to apply their knowledge and skill in work with children in other settings including their own children at home.' (Gardiner, p.9)

## **Maternity and Nanny Training Basingstoke**

### **Introduction**

Philippa Jones, of Maternity and Nanny Training (MNT), Basingstoke, was interviewed on 24 March 2005. Ms. Jones has a background in further education, teaching a variety of human biology and health sciences courses, including access courses. She is the founder of MNT and set the organisation up, as a private venture, on realising that there was no provision for the training of maternity nurses, and that there was little in the way of continuing professional development (CPD) available for home-based child carers. Maternity nurses provide in-house care for new born babies and their mothers, up to around eight weeks after birth, and are particularly in demand in the south-east region of England. The Council for Awarding Child Health Education (CACHE) was originally approached for assistance with planning and accreditation but did not feel that the proposals fell within its remit.

‘Then, fortunately, because I knew of the OCN through teaching access, I approached them, and all the doors flew open. And they said, “yes, why not? No problem”’.

The OCN accredited MNT’s flagship Maternity Practitioner Award (MPA), one of eight courses provided by MNT. The organisation’s MPA is, currently, the only accredited training for maternity nurses in the UK.

The MPA does not provide initial training for maternity nurses. The focus is on the provision of CPD, providing maternity nurse training for experienced child carers. Learners must meet a minimum set of criteria before they can be accepted by MNT for the OCN-accredited Maternity Practitioner Award although MNT prefers learners with five to ten years childcare experience. Training is carried out by eleven specialist trainers, who possess relevant qualifications and experience.

### **Progression**

The founding remit of MNT was to provide CPD in areas where it did not exist, specifically for maternity nurses. Without the MPA there would be no way in which CPD would be available to maternity nurse practitioners, and other training opportunities, such as MNT’s ‘sleep training’ course, or ‘care of multiples’ course, would be limited. As a result, Philippa Jones felt that MNT’s courses were ‘very attractive to maternity nurses’, whose desire to experience occupational progression ‘was the reason for so many of them to come’ to MNT. In addition, nanny recruiting agencies frequently refer young women interested in the area to MNT for information and training. For these learners, MNT courses provide a first route into employment as nannies.

In addition to occupational progression, there was also a degree of educational progression facilitated by MNT’s courses, particularly the MPA course. It was a common experience for learners to take a number of courses, returning to add to their range of studies. For a small number of learners, the OCN-accredited course proved to be a stepping-stone to further educational, and occupational, progression. Among this group of learners, it was common for them to go on to take access courses, and, from there, to early years degrees, and midwifery qualifications:

‘We do get people who go on to higher stuff or longer courses at the same level, or level 3 courses. And we have students who go on and do access courses, and we have students who go on and do early years degrees, and people who go on and do midwifery, and midwifery and nursing’.

For this group, the MPA was a first step to further educational opportunities, and Philippa Jones emphasized the importance of OCN accreditation in boosting the confidence of the learners.

### **Flexibility**

The OCN-accredited MPA course (and the other MNT courses) is built around the principle of providing easy access in the form of convenient, short-course provision. The short-course basis of provision is essential to its success, fitting learning around the working lives of students:

‘Most of the students are working, and, therefore, most of the courses are at weekends. It wouldn’t suit them to have to go and do a normal course, it’s not going to fit with their lifestyle, so the bite-sized element works so well from that point of view. But also in terms of their own confidence’.

In 2005 MNT will offer nine Maternity Practitioner Award courses. Three of these courses will be available to students of Norland College, Bath (a nanny training college), while the remainder will be open to non-Norland students. Learners on the course focus on the care of newborn babies and post-natal mothers. In addition, learners are given training about setting themselves up as sole traders, including advice with regards to financial aspects of self-employment. Each course lasts for two and a half days, and is completed over a weekend at a residential site, either at Reading University or Norland College. In addition, students are expected to undertake pre-reading, and are assessed on post-course work. There are five post-course assessments, and learners have a month to complete them. Assessment, verification, and moderation takes up to three weeks. The focus is on practical aspects of maternity nursing, and ‘writing is kept to a minimum’. Training staff offer a good deal of structured support, with proformas, schematic plans, and other frameworks being given out. Individual assessment is largely based on practical work.

MNT offers seven other training courses, and all follow the same model as the MPA, being built around the acquisition of learning on the basis of short courses. Some of these courses are taken by learners prior to their undertaking the MPA. For example, MNT offers an afternoon’s course in emergency paediatric first aid, which is focused on treating young babies and children under seven. An additional two day, twelve hour, first aid course is also offered. As in the MPA course, the focus is on short course provision focused on specific practical needs.

### **Widening participation**

The Maternity Practitioner Award provides the only accredited training for home-based maternity nurses, and, as such provides CPD for women in this sector, something that had not existed prior to MNT’s founding. Over 200 women have received this training in the first two years of the MPA’s presentation. The learners all have substantial experience in the field, but need access to CPD. However, as Philippa Jones pointed out, many of the learners are not at home with theoretical

training, and the CPD focus and career emphasis of the MPA brings learners into education who might otherwise remain outside:

'From the experience I have had from the students I have worked with, there seems to be a trend for, not all, but a reasonable proportion of the students that we have, maybe to have gone into the kind of work because they are very good practically, but perhaps they struggled academically [...]. And, often, it happens on every course, they come in terrified, they haven't studied for years, and the only reason they are in that room is because they want to become a maternity nurse. You know, wild horses wouldn't have dragged them to a college, it is the job aspect of it that is important'.

Further, MNT is in negotiation with the OCN to obtain accreditation of additional short courses which would enable learners with limited practical experience to build up credits in childcare training.

### **Quality and quality assurance**

Philippa Jones is very happy with OCN quality assurance, commenting:

'If I compare it, obviously I teach in FE, so I can compare it to things I deliver there, and, yes [...] it really [is] very rigorous. Your course is not going to get through unless it cuts the mustard, really. And that's good. And what they have got are really good systems, they've got excellent systems in place for the whole assessment, verification, and moderation process. It is quite explicit what the process is, and the forms are very accessible, very straightforward. And, yes, I think it is very thorough [...] it's as good as anything I deal with in FE or other courses'.

She has found the OCN to be responsive, flexible, and supportive, providing rapid and effective moderation of the Maternity Practitioner Award, having a good working relationship with the OCN moderator, who is a senior midwifery lecturer at Thames Valley University. Any problems or queries are dealt with quickly:

'If I've got an issue I ring them up, and get the answer I need really quickly. They want to help, and they want to support you as much as possible'.

## **Healthcare Train, Pembrokeshire**

### **Introduction**

Healthcare Train is a small private training organisation based in Pembrokeshire and run by two very senior nurses, one a nurse practitioner and the other an occupational health therapist and trauma counsellor. Their programmes range from entry level to level 2 and are designed to provide training for healthcare assistants with previous qualifications who may be working in the primary care sector as, for instance, receptionists and telephonists. The programme is run in partnership with Pembrokeshire College which draws down funding from ELWA and provides moderation and quality assurance processes.

As well as improving their knowledge of the sector in general, the training is intended to enable these learners to carry out such tasks as taking blood and operating ECG machines. The lack of an agreed national standard is a problem for accreditation and recognition of the qualification, but the programme is attracting attention from the Area Health Authority which sees it as a useful way of releasing time for senior practitioners and qualified nursing staff. Healthcare Train also provides training for nurses undertaking specialised chronic disease care such as diabetes care.

### **Progression and widening participation**

Successful achievement on this provision is seen as a positive career development move for learners either as continuing professional development or as a first step for support workers, who are often working mothers, and whose personal circumstances and family responsibilities may have prevented them from gaining qualifications or entering employment previously. These learners value the accreditation though they do not fully understand its significance. The providers are hopeful that the Credit and Qualification Framework for Wales (CQFW) will be helpful in ensuring currency for their units both with potential employers and with the learners themselves. Talks are also in progress with a local university about formal recognition of some of the training for entry to nursing and counselling programmes. It is clear that the programmes offered through Healthcare Train are providing new opportunities for learners in a relatively rural context to enter professional training and thus get onto the first rungs of a ladder which could lead into qualifications recognised within the NHS. Approximately 25% of learners at entry level are currently unemployed.

### **Flexibility**

The OCN pattern of accrediting small chunks of learning is seen as much more helpful than 'huge', year-long NVQ blocks of learning. The ability to lead learners through accredited blocks in less than 3 months with a 'strong focus on short, snappy study days run over a 6-month period' is seen as an essential success factor leading to strong learner achievement. So effective is the bite-sized approach to fostering learning that retention between linked units is running at nearly 100%. The providers compare the OCN approach very favourably to a predecessor programme which had low retention rates and was based on distance-learning and some delivery in the workplace by registered nurses acting as mentors. As well as issues with retention, that approach had depended on delivery through professionals who had appropriate qualifications in nursing but who were not qualified, or even informally trained, trainers. Given a combination of units developed by the Healthcare Train team and units from the MOCN accredited provision, it has been possible to cater for the

diverse needs of people employed in various sectors (not always in the NHS) and also the unemployed.

### **Quality**

The support from the OCN development officer during the curriculum development stage was excellent and there was further useful support from a college-based member of staff who helped steer the proposals through the approval committees. The process of moderation has been one characterised by developmental dialogue and has been seen as both robust and fair to candidates. The providers were surprised and pleased to discover that they could use off-the-shelf previously accredited units and look to doing more of this. They are currently delivering 25 units, 14 of which have been adopted from NOCN provision and 11 of which they have developed themselves. They have felt well supported in both processes, and are particularly pleased that this range of provision has given them the capacity to provide programmes which are relevant to the employment and development needs of widely varying categories of learner without lowering standards and within an articulated credit framework. Thus far, turnaround time in terms of quality assurance processes has been appropriate, though learners always want results sooner than they can be provided.

**Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trusts  
Education Liaison Team  
Partnership Projects Working with Young People**

**Introduction**

Lynda Ross-Field of the Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trusts (LTHT) Education Liaison Team (ELT) was interviewed on 21 March 2005. She has a background in FE teaching, psychology, and mental health work. As part of the ELT's programme, they run a number of OCN-accredited courses, particularly under the ELT's 'Health, Well Being, and Citizenship Project'. The courses were originally delivered in schools and PRUs in Leeds, and have spread to other towns in the region, including Bradford, Barnsley, Bridlington and Scarborough. The ELT makes use of expertise in particular areas to deliver aspects of their courses, for example, using midwives to provide material on pregnancy, school nurses on contraception and sexual health, and police officers on crime and responsibility. The OCN-accredited courses are taken by whole year groups, small groups of vulnerable children, and disaffected young people.

'The idea of the programme is to run PSHE projects in schools, but bringing in local expertise ... There are two goals to it; one is the health aspect, health information, health awareness, access to services. And the other is the education aspect, in that these young people [the disengaged] have probably never succeeded in education ever before. And once they get a certificate for doing the work for this, our evaluation tends to show that it increases their enthusiasm in general for achieving educationally'.

Courses are tailor-made to the needs of schools and young people. In six years of operation, some 2,000 young people in Leeds alone have been accredited.

**Progression**

The avenues of progression that are opened by the OCN-accredited courses as being an important strength of the model:

'There was a young lad who was at one of the Pupil Referral Units we worked with. He was in Year 11, and had been excluded from school, and I did a lot of one to one work with him, and he actually ended up getting a level 2 accreditation, which was the first time he'd ever done anything like that. And he went on to college with that'.

This was seen as a major achievement, and one that would have been unlikely without the use of the OCN-accredited course.

The ELT also provide OCN-accredited courses as part of a medical secretary programme. This has led to the employment of individuals by NHS trusts, including the Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trusts:

'We do an Open College Network medical secretary programme here, which was a direct spin-off from what we do in this office, and that is mainly for adults, and there are clear progression routes there, for people to start at an administrative and clerical grade, and then to progress on to becoming a medical secretary [...] It won an award'.

The ELT had developed the medical secretary course as a spin-off from the existing programmes and courses. It was seen to represent a 'logical employment progression'.

Progression from OCN-accredited courses into further education and work was helped because one of the strengths of the OCN approach was that learners acquired many transferable skills. This was not sufficiently appreciated by employers or some further and higher education providers and it would be helpful if greater efforts were made to publicise the nature of OCN-accredited courses, thereby building up the status of these courses vis a vis other qualifications. This was especially regrettable given OCN programmes were so effective at engaging disaffected learners who were not attracted by traditional courses.

### **Flexibility**

The inherent flexibility of the OCN approach was the key to its popularity with learners. Two characteristics in particular were important – the acceptability of different methods of assessment, and the fact that learning took place, and credit was gained, in manageable portions.

The benefit of flexible assessment was important because it enabled providers to match not just the content of courses to the needs of individual learners, but also to assess their work in suitable ways. An example was given of a disengaged youngster who was averse to producing portfolio work on sexual health and pregnancy in a written form:

'At one of the PRUs, I had a particularly difficult afternoon with two lads who didn't want to do their work sheets, because they didn't want to write. And I knew that one of them was quite good at art, so I said, "oh, draw it for me, do a cartoon". It was showing how teenage pregnancy affects a family. And he sat there for two hours and did it, and I've got it framed, and it clearly met the assessment criteria. So I think, again, tailor-made, for the assessment criteria is something that helps turn on disaffected young people'.

The 'bite sized' format of OCN-accredited courses was 'highly significant' in terms of engaging learners generally, but was particularly suited to the needs of disengaged and disaffected children. The OCN approach was characterised as providing disengaged children with a 'continuous reward system' which in turn offered further incentives to learning. The fact that credit was awarded for work done, and that credit could be accumulated at the learner's pace, was central to the 'consistently positive results' that qualitative and anecdotal evidence gained by the ELT had identified. Learners could build on prior learning, and build up qualifications from pieces of accredited work, and such work was of a high value. The ELT courses among disengaged children in Scarborough – 'a very challenging group of young people' – had been successful in producing 'portfolios of work which had gained GCSE level qualifications'. The tutor confessed that 'I'm a converted person [...] I came from a traditional GCSE, A level background and I have been converted to the OCN approach'.

### **Widening participation**

The ELT has routinely evaluated its OCN-accredited courses, using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Towards the end of programmes, questionnaires are given to pupils, school tutors, and voluntary staff who have taken part in the delivery of the

programmes. The evaluations have shown that the OCN-accredited courses have been uniformly successful in achieving the desired outcomes, not least in terms of widening participation.

One evaluation, of the Health and Well Being Programme (evaluated in July 2003) illustrated the strengths of the approach. The Programme contains six OCN-accredited courses, at entry level, level 1, and level 2. For example, the 'Health Issues' level 2 course covers the effects of drugs on the body, messages to young people on cannabis and other drugs use, the difference between the use and misuse of drugs, key elements in family planning and sexual health, pregnancy, and responsible parenting. The programme as a whole had, by the summer of 2003, been running for five years in Leeds schools and pupil referral units. The schools were selected on the basis of deprivation statistics, and management willingness to work with the ELT. This focus was designed to reach children from deprived backgrounds, particularly those who had disengaged from education. The evaluation showed that 89% of pupils said that the lessons and coursework made them feel more enthusiastic about learning in general, and 80% of pupils said they would recommend the lessons to their friends. School tutors also 'said that their pupils had benefited from the Programme in terms of confidence, attitude, willingness to learn and success in other subjects'. In 2002-2003 302 young people gained accreditation. In the five year period up to the 2003 evaluation, 1,788 accreditations were gained under the Health and Well Being Programme, 1,255 gaining accredited GCSE level certificates, and a further 275 accreditations were expected for 2003-2004.

### **Quality and quality assurance**

There was a belief that quality and quality assurance had improved over the last two or three years. In particular, experience of external moderation, and the help and support available from the Open College, had become even better:

'I think that the quality has got better and better with the Open College Network. I think that the moderation procedures that are in place now are very good. We've always got help and support from Open College moderators. I think quality assurance has greatly improved over the last two or three years. I used to teach GCSE and A level, so I am in a position to compare. They are on a par, if not better'.

High levels of quality and quality assurance were seen to be important, not just for the provider, but also for the learners. The high quality 'gives it value. It is crucial for their self confidence, and self esteem'.

## **Pyrford (Surrey) Pupil Referral Unit**

### **Introduction**

The interview was carried out at the Pyrford Pupil Referral Unit (PPRU) on 16 March 2005, with eight members of the PPRU's staff. The unit works with a variety of children, including excluded children, and those children, such as the school phobic, who are educated under the Education Other Than at School Programme (EOTS). In addition to offering basic literacy and numeracy education, and GCSEs in art, English, and mathematics, the unit also offers 22 OCN-accredited courses, largely at level 1, but including a level 2 course, 'Communication – Reading and Writing 2'. The OCN-accredited courses cover a wide range of themes: personal development, ITC, communication, science, basic chemistry, citizenship, healthy living, preparation for work, garden design, and DJ skills. The focus of the PPRU is to include disengaged children in education, and to facilitate progression in terms of employment and further education. The unit's experience of OCN-accreditation has been uniformly positive, and has improved learning outcomes compared with other methods of accreditation, and non-accredited courses. OCN-accredited courses are valued because they enable PPRU staff to create effective, high-quality, individualised programmes for children. Further, flexibility in terms of assessment, and the 'bite-sized' approach to acquiring credits, are seen to be additional strengths of OCN-accredited provision.

### **Progression**

The OCN-accredited courses offered by the PPRU were seen to be extremely successful in delivering progression for a variety of reasons. It was noted by one member of staff that a crucial aspect of the OCN approach was the way in which learners could build up credits in a piecemeal fashion. She characterised this as the success of the 'small gobbets approach'. This staff member noted that for the children that the PPRU dealt with (children from Years 10 and 11), GCSEs were a very difficult prospect. Other members of staff supported this view, arguing that GCSEs were often unsuitable for the children in question because of the two year long scope of GCSEs, and the importance of deadline determined coursework. These problems were not present with the OCN-accredited courses, and staff members made the contrast:

[With OCN] 'you say to them, "you've only got that bit to do. You are so close to it." It's about the bite-sized chunks, it is achievable, whereas GCSEs are a two year thing, and they've never been able to get the rewards from that.'

'Even if it is something they enjoy doing [at GCSE], they can't see in front of them, they can't see that far ahead.'

In addition, progression to the mathematics, English, and art GCSEs had been improved by the introduction of OCN-accredited courses. One member of staff commented:

'The road towards GCSEs is patchy insofar as coursework wouldn't be of that high a standard; there'd be no choice of coursework. Now, with the OCN, with the additional work being done in communication, I think that has strengthened the approach to GCSE... there is a much higher level, the performance in mocks is very, very pleasing, which it never has been in the past, and their coursework, for English in particular, but also maths, has been

much, much better than we've seen in the past. And I think we're looking at an improvement in the GCSEs because the OCN has provided a steady platform, which GCSE on its own would never do, we know that from experience.'

The OCN-accredited courses had helped deliver progression in educational and employment terms. The local further education college had accepted PPRU learners with OCN-accreditation. In addition, success on OCN-accredited courses meant that:

'we've had more children, this year, considering college than we've ever had before. Because they feel that they've got achievements, and that they are capable of it. It has raised their aspirations.'

It was noted by all the staff that the aspirations of children at the PPRU had noticeably increased. It had 'widened their expectations of what they could go for'.

Similarly, learners who would, prior to the adoption of OCN-accredited courses, have had little to put on their CVs, were able to build them around their success in the OCN-accredited courses. In addition, learners were also able to use their successes as the basis for job interviews. Both these benefits also helped to build the confidence of students in their employability, something that was apparent in the success of PPRU students in obtaining employment. However, one of the interviewees noted that: 'Most of the employers I have spoken to haven't a clue what the OCN means'. This was attributed to the variety of qualifications available, many of which employers were unfamiliar with. Nonetheless, further discussion of this issue led another member of staff to make the generally agreed statement:

'Although employers might not be too sure exactly what OCN courses are, they can see that the students have studied. You know, one boy has done 21 OCN units. He is very proud of that'.

It was felt that whether or not employers had a clear idea about the OCN accredited courses, obtaining credits was an important part of the pupils' 'cv-building process', and one that 'definitely' had an impact on employers.

### **Flexibility**

Members of staff were enthusiastic about the flexibility of the OCN approach, since they were able to construct individualised programmes for the learners, as well as filling gaps that existed under other systems. For example, the science tutor at the PPRU had written six OCN science modules to cover a gap that existed for their students. Learners were able to complete two units a term, which gave them achievable, realisable goals that were situated in the foreseeable future. Furthermore, the fact that credit was gained for everything that was done was seen by staff as a positive characteristic of the approach. This was favourably contrasted with AQA's PSHE course, which, while dealing with many of the topics that the PPRU's courses covered, still required students to complete six units before any credit was gained, and used an examination-based format. One member of staff praised the fact that, under the OCN scheme, there were 'so many different methods of assessment'. She highlighted the use of photographic evidence, and witness reports, in this respect. One of her colleagues noted that under the OCN approach, 'we can tailor make [courses] to our requirements'. This was seen to be vital given the particular, and often unique, needs of individual children at the PPRU.

The fact that credit could be earned in a 'bite-sized' fashion, and that the courses were accredited, had changed the educational experience and success of the PPRU. Prior to adopting the OCN model, the PPRU had experienced little in the way of success in terms of encouraging children to complete courses. Examples were given of car maintenance and building courses that the PPRU had created (using outside providers) for their children. It had been difficult to encourage children to take, or complete, these courses. This 'disaster' was attributed to the fact that the courses were not accredited, that there was, in the words of a staff member: 'nothing at the end of it, no paperwork at the end of it.' Further, it was felt that the lack of accreditation, and the inapplicability of other approaches, such as GCSEs, reinforced the children's sense of failure. The OCN approach meant that success was 'much more achievable:

'In the course of a two year study, GCSEs are a long time coming, aren't they? Whereas they can complete an OCN unit in half a term, and they have achieved it, and that's a great feeling of satisfaction for them, which otherwise they have not had in their school career'.

The fact that the learners could see how near success was through the completion of small, credit-worthy, course units helped them overcome another problem that they faced:

'These kids are programmed to think that they'll fail, and I think that by achieving their first OCN, really gives them such a boost'.

### **Widening Participation**

The majority of the PPRU's education programme is built around the provision of OCN-accredited courses – some 22 courses out of a total of 29 courses offered by the unit. Staff made it clear that the adoption of the OCN approach had dramatically increased take-up and completion rates for children at the PPRU. This, in itself, was a clear example of widening participation. In addition, the situation of EOTS children was raised by members of staff. The Pyrford unit had pioneered the use of OCN-accredited courses. The pilot had been successful, and the approach had been extended by Pyrford, and other PRUs in Surrey.

Success in the EOTS programme was seen to be a major achievement, widening participation by children 'who are probably the most unmotivated' that the PPRU deals with. The example was given of a learner with mental health problems, who had successfully completed five OCN-accredited courses. Prior to the provision of the OCN courses, the learner in question had not been engaged by education.

### **Quality and quality assurance**

The staff believed that their courses were well moderated, and that quality was guaranteed: 'very rigorous [standards], moderated from beginning to end.' Quality was important to the unit in order to maintain the interest of local employers and further education providers, as well as to maintain the confidence of the learners in the value of the courses. In connection with this, it was felt that because of the nature of OCN assessment, the children were aware of the need to maintain high standards in their work. One member of staff commented: 'the children have become more aware of self-assessment'.

The fact that work could be assessed in a variety of ways was seen to be a strength of the OCN approach. It enabled staff to respond imaginatively to the needs of the children, and allowed work being undertaken away from the PRU to be assessed, without sacrificing quality. The example was given of a boy who was given a lead role in a local youth club:

'We have one student who is taking a lead role in a community youth club, and he has opted to be chairman of the youth centre. There are local community leaders involved in it, and the local police, and what he has brought to me are minutes of the meetings. And I've got statements from the community police officer telling me what role [the learner] has taken in these meetings, and all that information is leading towards his speaking and listening, level 2, OCN. So, we've actually been able to reward work that he's done outside the centre. And, in terms of e-mails, the community police officer has sent me, he's doing such fabulous work, "I really want to encourage him, is there any way you can accredit it?" And, of course, the OCN was there to do that.'

This was an example, commented another member of staff, of 'the fabulous work that is there that can be accredited.'

OCN-accredited courses are moderated externally and internally. Documentary evidence was provided of the internal moderation procedures for the PRU's EOTS courses. Key Stage 4 co-ordinators within the centre oversee the programmes for EOTS children, and act as the internal moderators. The moderation document outlines the stages and requirements of internal moderation:

'The Key Stage 4 co-ordinators will be trained in the OCN Internal Moderator Award and the OCN Tutor Assessor award, and will provide INSET for all staff on an ongoing basis dependent on identified need. The tutor responsible for the delivery of a specific unit will be responsible for the assessment of that unit'.

Each responsible tutor has to complete a Record of Achievement Sheet, and an Assignment Record Sheet, along with a portfolio containing all the learner's assessed work. The role of the internal moderator is to

'sample an appropriate range of student portfolios and an appropriate amount of assessed pupils' work (Ratio 1:4) and record this on the Unit Record of Achievement Sheet.'

Further, once the external moderators report is received, all the internal moderators meet to review progress, from which meeting a written report is produced.

## **Health Care Assistant Training Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust**

### **Introduction**

NVQs have for some while been the dominant model in healthcare training, and the Plymouth team started out using them for the training of Health Care Assistants in the early 1990s. However, after a few years their lack of flexibility led the team to explore alternatives and to work with OCN South West to develop a level 2 course which was tailored more closely to local needs. This was followed by the introduction of a level 3 course in 1999. Both courses involve a partnership with the Trust's local FE college which accesses LSC funding on behalf of the Trust and operates appropriate quality assurance procedures.

The level 2 course enables nursing auxiliaries to acquire the underpinning knowledge to allow them to deliver effective, holistic care. Successful completion of the course is usually a prerequisite for progression from professional grade A to grade B. The level 3 course builds on this to enable Health Care Assistants to develop more complex nursing skills and to increase their academic knowledge. Again, successful completion is a prerequisite for professional progression, in this case from grade B to grade C. The level 3 course also provides successful candidates with the necessary alternative educational qualification to apply for Student Nurse Training. Indeed, one of the three principle course objectives is to "develop academic skills to enable possible progression to Higher Education."

Two of the key players in developing and delivering this provision, Jacqui Connell and Sarah Hockey, were interviewed at the Trust's Practice Education Centre in Plymouth on 17 March 2005. During the visit it also proved possible to spend some time with the internal verifier for the courses to discuss quality assurance arrangements.

### **Progression**

Progression is an integral part of the rationale for these courses. The level 2 course is designed to lead on to level 3 and, as indicated above, professional progression for Health Care Assistants is dependent on successful completion of the courses. The explicit objective of the level 3 course to provide a basis for study at HE level is reflected in the significant number of students who progress to university. Interestingly, many of those students then return to the Trust after graduation – 'retention' in the sense of keeping staff despite their acquisition of higher level skills and qualifications is not, therefore, seen as a problem. 'Retention' in the usual educational sense is impressive – 93% of those embarking on the programme complete it.

### **Flexibility**

It was the belief that:

'NVQs in health and social care do not meet the needs of our District General Hospital nor the needs of our learners'

that demonstrated the need for a more flexible form of provision that could be tailored to the employer's local circumstances. Those who developed the programme believe that

'OCN provision is unique as courses can be customised to fulfil the real needs of the industry which NVQs do not address.'

From the point of view both of the student and of those delivering the courses it is clear that this

'assists learners to develop knowledge and skills in activities that are relevant to their employment while as an employer the provision is attractive as it assists in developing staff for the roles that they are or will be involved in, which in turn enhances the quality of the service provision'

The freedom to design an approach to assessment which met the needs of learners was as valued as the flexibility to tailor content, and the bite sized character of the constituent units meant that in those rare cases when a student was unable to continue with the course (usually for personal rather than academic reasons) then they had something to show for their achievements. One further application of the 'bite sized' approach was particularly noteworthy: the creation of additional optional units at level 3 which enable students who have not covered specific areas in their original level 3 course to acquire additional enhanced nursing skills. These additional optional units effectively constitute a complementary programme of continuing professional development.

### **Widening Participation**

In the main those starting on the level 2 Health Care Assistant course do not have strong educational backgrounds. The ages of student vary, but a majority are older learners who would not otherwise have been attracted back into education and who are apprehensive about re-engaging with learning. For many, even though the course is clearly vocational, personal development is a strongly motivating factor and, along with the provision of study skills and other forms of support, student confidence is built through working with course content that is closely related to the reality of the local workplace and which is delivered by staff with whom students have already developed a professional relationship.

### **Quality**

The quality enhancement function of the OCN, through the support of the link Development Officer, was acknowledged and appreciated by the course team. There were no concerns over quality assurance arrangements and staff who had experience of working with other awarding bodies believed that OCN processes were every bit as rigorous. The internal verification function was taken very seriously and appeared to be carried out in an exemplary fashion.

Finally, the case study threw up two further points of note. The first concerns the general issue of the wider recognition of OCN accredited provision and in particular the refusal of the Royal College of Nursing to recognise holders of the Health Care Assistant level 3 award for membership whereas students with NVQ level 3 are accepted. The second concerns the future funding of the courses by the local LSC and some uncertainty over resourcing in future. Any withdrawal of LSC funding would mean that the Trust (which could not continue to run the courses from its own resources) would have to resort to other programmes for which it could be funded yet which it knows, on the basis of past experience, are far less appropriate than the highly successful provision it has developed with its local OCN.

**'Good Business Sense'**  
**College of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Enterprise**  
**Greenmount, Antrim**

**Introduction**

The College of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Enterprise is the major provider of OCN accredited courses for the farming industry in Northern Ireland. The short-course co-ordinator, Willie McLaughlin, who was interviewed on 11 March, 2005, is concerned with OCN provision for the farming community, and his department provides a number of accredited courses:

- Introductory programme.
- Intermediate programmes: including, the Rural Management Programme, the Good Business Sense, the Good Farming Practice, Farming and Rural Skills, and Quality Initiative programmes

The intermediate programmes represent a total of 15 accredited units.

Mr McLaughlin is particularly involved with the provision of the Good Business Sense (GBS) programme. He has four College of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Enterprise employees devoted to the organisation of the GBS programme. The course is delivered throughout Northern Ireland by 25-30 contracted trainers, whose remit is to provide the GBS course at local level, with a target of providing a training centre (usually community halls and schools) within ten miles of every learner. From the initial presentation of the course in January, 2002, some 9,000 people have undertaken the course. This represents a substantial proportion of the 28,000 farming businesses in Northern Ireland.

The GBS course is composed of the following:

- Introductory Course (2 units):
  - Livestock traceability and farm records
  - Cash flow and making sound financial decisions
- Intermediate Courses:
  - Completing farm VAT returns
  - Calculating a gross margin for farm enterprise (3 x 2 hours)
  - Time management

(All units are 2 x 2 hours, except for the gross margin unit).

**Progression**

Willie McLaughlin had an accurate and detailed knowledge of the impact of the GBS units, as he undertakes continuous evaluation of the units, both immediately following unit delivery, and six months after learners have completed the units.

For many of the learners, these Northern Ireland Open College Network (NIOCN) accredited units are the first qualifications that they have obtained. In this context, Mr McLaughlin believed that accreditation was very important for learners. It acted, in his opinion, as a taster for further education, and provided an enticement for educational progression:

'I arranged a presentation, for accreditation, and the excitement of that, and the look on their faces, and what they said as well, you know. It has given them a flavour, an enticement, if you like, to progress on to further training'.

He was able to support this view with reference to feedback from learners on the GBS introduction and VAT units conducted six months after the completion of training (July to November, 2004). Of 166 learners who responded to the questionnaire on the introductory unit, 30% progressed to further training. Of 136 learners who responded to the VAT unit questionnaire, 23 % progressed to further training. It was the college's policy to introduce learners to further training possibilities:

'We found that one of the better ways of selling this [progression] is that, towards the last night of the introductory course we would make them aware that there are other courses on hand here. And, quite often, they have gelled as a group, having covered three or four nights. If you say, "well, look, would you like to continue on here, for another two or three nights, and take in these other ones [courses] ?" And quite often that will be the case, and the majority in the group will decide, "yes"'.

The courses 'hooked up' many non-traditional earners for further learning, which was a desirable outcome as far as the college was concerned:

'We see this as a springboard, you know [...] We see it as a hook really, to get people on to some other higher level courses we run, what we call our challenge programmes, which are Edexcel accredited programmes. These are much longer, they are 10-15 evenings or afternoons, and they would take material to a higher level, to level 2 and level 3'.

Many learners were interested in building up a portfolio of accredited work. Certification by the NIOCN, and the realisation that units generated nationally recognised qualifications, gave the courses much greater impact, and made them more attractive, than if learners just received 'certificates of attendance'. This would become an even more important issue in an increasingly globalised economy:

'It is becoming more important that qualification is a nationally recognised qualification, not only within the UK, but internationally [...], and it is one reason why we pursue accreditation with the Open College Network'.

### **Flexibility**

The fact that ten hours learning was sufficient to earn credit from the NIOCN was 'an excellent approach':

'I think it is an excellent approach that the NIOCN has in terms of these small units of learning. It is only 10 hours of learning to get a credit, it used to be 30 hours to get a credit [...] there is a recognition for all of that [work]. I think that as a principle it is good in that it allows people who are already involved in the workplace to come along, in the evening, outside working hours, and it allows them to get up to date with current developments within the industry'.

The particular time demands of farming meant that without this commitment to small units of learning, it would be very difficult for learners from the farming community to

participate in such training. In some cases, this was of great practical importance, and the case was cited of a woman farmer who had contacted one of the trainers to thank him, after taking the traceability unit, to say that her completion of the course had saved her around £3,000 as a result of being made fully aware of regulations concerning livestock. The unit-based approach was extremely flexible, and provided a 'very exciting way to progress learning'.

### **Widening participation**

The current short-course target for the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise is to reach 10,000 members of the Northern Irish farming community by 2007-2008. With a current reach of around 9,000 learners, the department is well on the way to meeting this target. The team has made extensive efforts to draw in a wide range of learners from the community. In 2003 they distributed 30,000 leaflets advertising their NIOCN accredited courses, followed by a further 20,000 in 2004. Farmers were targeted via a variety of routes, for example, through the weekly livestock bulletins, via meat plants mailings, through farmers' unions, and via the Young Farmers Clubs.

The courses were tied to the particular demands of the farming community by ensuring local provision, stressing the 'bite-sized chunks' approach of NIOCN accredited courses, and making sure that provision matched the farming year, with most courses running in the October to March period. In addition, constant revision of course content to match changing agriculture law and regulation, backed by rapid accreditation from the NIOCN, enabled the short course team to add a further selling point when advertising the courses to the farming community. The stress throughout was on drawing in as many of the community as possible by gearing all facets of course provision to local, community and industry needs.

### **Quality**

Quality assurance was a key issue for the college and learners. Mr McLaughlin was pleased with quality control by the NIOCN, and felt that they were particularly responsive to changing needs, and the rapid amendment of the courses which characterised agricultural education. This was, in his view, a particular strength of the NIOCN.

In terms of the trainers employed by the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise, a minimum requirement was a degree or HND in an appropriate discipline, the contracted company (appointed after competitive tender) had to provide confirmatory evidence regarding trainers' skills and education. In addition, the short-course team observed training sessions, and kept the trainers up to date with twice-yearly update sessions.

## **OCNW Provision at Craven College, Skipton**

### **(i) The provider perspective**

#### **Introduction**

Susan Harrison, of Craven College, Skipton, was interviewed on 5 April, 2005. Ms. Harrison has worked at Craven College for four years, teaching English AS and A2, and English-related courses, such as creative writing. In addition, she is the Open College North West (OCNW) co-ordinator for Craven College. The college offers 92 OCNW accredited courses, covering a wide range of subjects, from cookery courses to languages, IT, and rural and sports activities. Craven College:

'is one of the OCNW's largest provider of progression units, we do everything from [...] dry stone walling, we do language courses, introduction to Spanish, holiday Spanish. We do quite a few catering [courses], we do a huge number of IT courses, from web page design to straightforward computing, digital imaging, [...] We are trying to cater for lots of different types of market'.

Courses are delivered at the college in Skipton, and in four community learning centres in Settle, Bentham, Askrigg, and Grassington, and in community centres and schools in Nidderdale, Ingleborough, Leyburn, and Middleham. These outreach centres currently offered OCNW courses at level 1 only, but planning was underway to extend the scope of OCNW provision at these centres. The key aim was to tackle travel barriers encountered by potential learners in rural areas. The majority of OCNW students at the College are studying at level 1, with some 250-280 students at level 2, and around 90 learners studying at level 3. Those students taking level 2 and above are encouraged to go on to the access programme that the college runs. Popular fields of study are in social work, nursing, criminal psychology, counselling, and leisure.

#### **Progression**

Given the wide range of courses offered by the college, the motivations of learners varied widely. For example, many language students took courses such as 'Holiday German', or 'Spanish Survival kit for holidays'. These students were learning for the particular end of acquiring basic, holiday-orientated, language skills. However, students often progressed from one language course to another, as their holiday destinations changed. Horizontal progression, from one course at level 1 to another level 1 course was a frequent occurrence. Progression was differentiated by the particular demands of learners:

'Some of the progression units like psychology and counselling, yes, you can see definite progression, from the progression unit, to level 2 and level 3. And the pathways in access that we have that are very popular are nursing, social work, [and] we are also hoping to develop the criminal psychology [course] for September. Lots of courses like that, they move from level 1, to level 2, to level 3. With other things, like catering, and foreign languages, that is more difficult for them to progress, so a lot of those students will literally move around the progression units [i.e. level 1], and they are progressing, because they are widening their education'.

It was difficult to keep track of some forms of progression, whether educationally or occupationally, as learners would take courses over a number of years to fit in with

their particular needs. This was especially so with learners who took part-time courses.

‘Because we offer the access programme on a part-time basis, they can build that up over several years, and it’s more difficult to keep track on who’s going on, they may not go on straight away. We had this great debate at our last conference at OCNW, that, actually, need it be called access to higher education? Could it not be called access? It could be access to anything, because, of course, a lot of our students use it for the job they are already doing, they’re wanting better qualifications, or they’re wanting a slightly different route in the job they are already doing [...] Certainly, the nursing and social work [learners], they go on to university, but because we are trying to widen the part-time element, that is more difficult to quantify’.

However, a number of learners had taken full time OCNW courses, and had progressed to higher education. One such learner, Pat, had, through OCNW study, been offered places at Leeds, Bradford and Huddersfield universities, for entry in 2005/06. (She was also interviewed, and her account is included here).

### **Flexibility**

The majority of learners are part-time students, fitting learning journeys into the pattern of their work and family lives. More women than men were taking OCNW courses, and very few could afford to commit to full time study. In this context, the ‘bite-sized’ nature of OCNW study was an essential aspect of the model:

‘A lot of them can’t commit to full-time learning, because they have young children. So I think, for our learners, basically, to be able to do it in bite-sized pieces is very important. I think if it *had* to be a full-time course, that would put people off, I’m sure. The other thing, of course, is that we do have students who are working, who are doing evening classes. Clearly, they can’t, because of funding issues largely; a lot of them need to work to be able to fund their education. It’s only free, of course, if you’re full time, and those students will have to give up earning. The sort of people we are trying to attract, people that haven’t got a formal education, clearly, how they are going to live while they are doing it is a major issue’.

The college tried to make this type of study more attractive, for example, for single parents, by providing a nursery on site, and, for working people, by running many of its OCNW courses in the evenings.

### **Widening participation**

Craven College is committed to a continuing programme of widening participation in both a demographic and geographical sense, and had recently employed a new member of staff with the sole remit of promoting access courses. All courses are advertised widely in a variety of ways. The college maintains an information centre and recruiting office in the centre of Skipton, advertising is undertaken in the local and regional press, and spring, summer, and autumn prospectuses are published. Susan Harrison pointed out that the college was a well-known institution, and that many of its students came by word-of-mouth recommendations. The college draws students from as far afield as Bradford, Settle, and Barnoldswick. The college has made efforts to reach into deprived areas, and to target educationally excluded groups. In particular, single parents with little formal education were a focus of the

college's outreach programme and in this connection, OCNW courses played a central part. OCNW courses offered flexibility, in terms of learning, credit-building, and timing that was particularly attractive to previously unengaged learners:

'Basically, we are trying to recruit across lots of different markets. And, really, with the progression units, that's where they are great, because you can get lots of different groups together. We can get a group of young parents, maybe, who are wanting to go on to university but also older learners who are studying for personal development reasons.'

In terms of widening participation the key was the flexibility of the OCN approach, which enabled learners 'to focus on the things that they are interested in doing'. The basic programme of five weeks, with one two hour session per week, was seen to be an excellent introduction to learning. Further, the fact that these ten hours of learning led to accreditation was a 'key motivating factor'. The college was actively expanding the courses it offered into the more deprived areas it served and OCNW courses were seen to be particularly suited to attracting the type of learner who was being targeted.

'Largely those people are doing OCNW courses, because the sort of course we have with the OCNW are flexible, they don't have to do exams at level 1 and level 2. So, for people that haven't been in education for a long time, they are ideal. Really, for the progression units, you have a specification, and as long as we fit the specification, it is completely flexible. ...You can focus on the things that they are interested in doing'.

### **Quality and quality assurance**

Ms. Harrison noted that when she took over the role of OCNW co-ordinator at Craven College, she felt that there was some concern among members of staff not engaged in OCNW work that 'certificates were [just] handed out'. She was at pains to stress that this was not the case. She had put in place additional moderation procedures, and made colleagues aware that the OCNW would apply 'action points' if it felt that any provider was not reaching OCNW standards. She commented:

'The moderation process is pretty strict, but, at the same time [...] I've been working this year on trying to have someone in each division that is responsible for moderating work from tutors as well'.

And:

'In terms of moderation and assessment they [the OCNW] are very good at handling the processes.

She felt that she had good contacts with OCNW, and that she was confident with the outcomes. Overall, she noted that, as a college:

'We are very happy with OCNW provision. And almost every manager that I speak to is very happy to look at running new courses'.

## **Craven College, Skipton**

### **ii) The learner perspective**

#### **Introduction**

Pat, a learner taking OCNW accredited courses in psychology and sociology, level 3, and criminology, level 2, at Craven College during the academic year 2004/05, was interviewed on 5 April, 2005. Pat is from Bradford, in her late 30s, and is the mother of three children, the eldest of whom is 16 years old. Prior to returning to education at Craven College, Pat had achieved 'a few' CSEs at school. She had, for a long time, wanted to return to education, but felt that there were barriers preventing her from doing so. It was only when her eldest child brought home a Craven College prospectus, prior to re-taking GCSEs at the college, that Pat realised that there were routes available to her as an adult returner to education. She had a clear idea as to the progression path that she envisaged:

'I have been thinking about coming back to learning for a long time, but, obviously, family commitments and working commitments were in the way. I came to Skipton [i.e. Craven] College this year because my daughter who is 16, started a course here, so we thought it would be fun to come to college together. I want to find a better job, and get better qualifications [...] I'm hoping to go into criminal psychology'.

#### **The learner's needs**

As a mother, and a wage-earner, Pat faced a number of barriers to returning to education. These constraints concerned time, income and costs, and her family commitments. Financial issues loomed large. Full time study enabled her to access fee-free education. However, her work-generated income was vital. The only solution open to her was to compress her working week into night shifts worked over each weekend. This left the week free for study, and cushioned the financial effects of her study plans:

'I do work full time; I couldn't afford to do these modules one at a time. I now work weekend nights'.

She had decided that she wished to pursue courses that would enable her to gain access to higher education in the region. Given her age, she wished to complete the necessary courses in as short a time as possible. This also reinforced the financial imperatives of taking OCNW courses on a full-time, rather than a part-time basis:

'I think it is the time span, because, obviously, I'm not getting any younger. I can't afford to spend two to three years before I go to the university'.

After years of being outside formal education, Pat found the prospect of returning to studying a 'daunting' one. She had previously attempted some home-study, but had found it difficult to motivate herself to complete such study. However, the OCN courses she was taking at Craven College were, she felt, ideal. She was pleased by the levels of support she had received from the college, and cited the help she had been given in applying for university shortly after beginning her OCN studies:

'In the beginning, particularly in study techniques, where you are starting to do your personal statements for your UCAS forms, and things like that, it's within a month of starting the course, and not studying for so long, and all of a

sudden I'm applying for university, and I haven't even got into the course yet. Now that can be pretty difficult and daunting'.

And:

'We were helped all the way with that [the UCAS application process], the support was brilliant'.

### **Progression**

Pat felt that she had, since starting at college in September 2004, progressed rapidly in terms of her learning skills. By the end of the autumn term she had been in a position where she had to complete two substantial essays, in addition to preparing presentations. She had successfully completed this work, and was pleased with her success:

'They are really daunting tasks just to start them, because, obviously, I've never done them before. But, once you start, it sort of goes, and then you hand it in, and you think, "I don't want that back", and then when you get your result back from it, it is just a buzz'.

Pat had succeeded in gaining conditional offers from the universities of Huddersfield, Bradford, and Leeds, to read psychology. Huddersfield and Bradford's offers were based on success in the OCNW courses alone, while Leeds University wanted 60% pass rates in the OCNW courses, and a grade D in GCSE mathematics. She was, at the time of the interview, attending open days at the universities, aiming to choose an institution that she felt comfortable with. For Pat, the combination of OCNW courses and study at Craven College had been a success:

'I just wish I had done it years ago. It is so much fun, you meet so many good people. I mean, I enjoy study, I've tried to study before on my own, but unsuccessfully. I need the structure of coming to college'.

**'Second Chance & Return to Learn'  
National Health Service University (NHSU)/Unison  
Belfast**

**Introduction**

Paul Donaghy, of the NHSU, Northern Ireland, was interviewed on 12 April 2005. He was previously UNISON's Northern Ireland education officer, and manager of the UNISON-led Workplace Learning Initiative in Northern Ireland. In addition, he had represented the trade union movement on the Fair Employment Agency and Commission, the Standing Advisory Committee on Human Rights, and the Equality Commission. As UNISON's education officer, he was in charge of the training of UNISON activists, and the Return to Learn Programme (R2L), the latter responsibility proving to be significant:

'I moved to UNISON when it was set up to be their education officer, and most of the work I was involved in was the training of our activists, shop stewards, health and safety reps, things like that. But we also had a thing called Return to Learn, and I thought, I have enough things to do without that, if people want a second chance at learning, they can go to their local college or whatever. But I must say, I was really enthused by it after having met the learners, really excited, and I, incrementally, spent more time developing second chance initiatives than I was spending in activist education'.

Through his work at UNISON, he had 'become a disciple of the OCN', and its 'concept of having your learning accredited based on your learning outcomes'. He was also involved in the Department of Employment and Learning's Second Chance initiative in the education and health sectors, which was targeted at:

'those most distanced from learning. So it was our home helps, catering, support staff, porters, it was our school meals workers, school cleaners, it was those who probably left school with few, or no, qualifications, many of them having poor experiences of school. So it was about how do we construct mechanisms that turn people on to learning? And ... also to emancipate, and I don't think that is an inappropriate word, emancipate the workforce?'

In his role at the NHSU, Mr Donaghy is concerned with the provision of education opportunities for workers in the health services sector, as part of a work based second chance at learning, and provision for people, particularly 'middle-aged mothers' seeking to return to the workplace. It was his belief that work-based learning, utilising the OCN model, led to benefits accruing to employers, individuals, and society as a whole:

'We need to learn that the ultimate continual improvement process is the learning process. So we support people in creating opportunities for increased productivity, for doing things better, and, in the health context, developing better patient care. What it also does, at the same time, is to develop the individual, and to develop the individual in the way that they can start to see the benefit of learning, and they can start to see the benefits that this society tends to offer for middle classes, but don't offer to those who are disadvantaged, or who are unemployed'.

This was, for Mr Donaghy, a question of education that was linked directly to issues of inequality and equality:

'I see what we are doing in terms of workplace learning is meeting the same objectives that I've worked for around equality issues, tackling inequality, and what I've been working for in relation to trade union employment'.

### **Progression**

Mr Donaghy argued that the concept of progression needed to be seen in as wide a sense as possible. He felt that many people in powerful positions had traditional views of learning that made it difficult to understand other positions, experiences, and learning routes:

'Progression, and the route to people being empowered to develop their own pathways is important, but for the traditional mindset, and, of course, the traditional mindset is dictated by those who have power and influence within this society, and those people who have power and influence within this society tend to be the people who have come through the traditional route, so they understand GCSEs, 'O' levels, 'A' levels, university. But what they don't understand is those who are most distanced from learning.'

In this context, the 'traditional mindset' had too narrow a formulation of the concept of progression. Second chance learning was, in his view, about a range of issues which fundamentally focused on the empowerment of individuals. That empowerment was essential to workforce development, social inclusion, disadvantage, inequality. As a result, progression could be seen in terms of personal progress and empowerment, as well as in the more usual senses of progression to work, or progression to further educational opportunities.

Paul Donaghy gave a number of examples of different forms of personal progression through OCN courses. He noted that 'one in four adults in Northern Ireland have difficulty reading and writing', and that the flexibility that is inherent in assessment of OCN courses encouraged these people to return to learning. Further, for many learners, progression was 'not upward, but *across*'. These learners used the OCN in a flexible way, 'developing competencies' in a variety of new fields, trying out different options, perhaps in order to investigate new occupational possibilities:

'For most of the people I work with, progression is about something different. Progression is about developing themselves, progression, for them, quite often, is not upwards, along a career ladder, but it may be across. So, it may be somebody who is currently a home help who would like to work in an admin and clerical office. It maybe somebody who is an admin and clerical officer who may like to work in the clinical area of the health service. And, quite often, what those people do, and those who come through the traditional route would seldom do, quite often what they would do, if they are at level 3, they would drop down to level 2 in another discipline, so that they don't feel threatened by expectations of moving into a new area. And they will develop their competencies at level 2, and then move to level 3, and probably beyond'.

Progression could also be seen on a much more personal level, as learners used OCN courses to boost self-confidence, critical awareness, and an informed reflectivity about their lives. It is:

‘about helping people to challenge things, about helping people to think for themselves, and it is about that critical thought process. That is what education, training and learning should be about’.

Mr Donaghy also gave examples of progression in terms of further education and employment. He referred to a case when he was UNISON’s education officer, of a nursing auxiliary at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast, who had taken OCN courses under the Return to Learn Programme. She had wanted to be a nurse, but as she was her family’s main income earner she could not afford to give up work to go to university fulltime to study nursing. However, her experience of OCN learning inspired her to ask the Royal Victoria Hospital if it could support her progression to a nursing degree. The hospital felt unable to offer her more than a place on the bank of auxiliaries they drew upon, but she, nevertheless, went on to attend Queen’s University, Belfast.

During the time in his current post, Paul Donaghy has also worked with the Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education, and the Health Learning Works Group, using OCN courses, at level 2, to open employment opportunities in healthcare for unemployed workers in East Belfast. The workers involved spent three months learning with OCN courses, building self-confidence and self-esteem, and adding to their knowledge base. Then they were given placements, and, at the end of the project seven of the original cohort of nine had been supported into permanent healthcare jobs in East Belfast.

There were, nonetheless, issues that needed to be tackled in connection with enabling progression in educational terms. He referred to the case of two highly successful Open College learners who came across an unexpected (although temporary) barrier to their progression via the OCN to university:

‘We had this example, where there were a couple of nursing auxiliaries that had been through a UNISON Return to Learn programme, and had achieved six level three credits, and went on to do a UNISON tutors’ programme, and they had achieved Open College Network uncapped credits. And they went to the University of Ulster to apply to their nursing programme, and the University of Ulster said, “What are these Open College Network things?” Now, it’s bad enough for an employer not to understand that, but at least it’s not their core function to know about this. It’s a bit naff whenever you have, what is supposed to be a centre of excellence, not understanding that there are other forms of learning currency’.

### **Flexibility**

Paul Donaghy was enthusiastic about the structure of OCN accredited learning. He noted that for learners, accreditation was vitally important, and that learners made it clear that ‘we want evidence of what we have achieved, and the Open College Network provides that evidence’. It was linked to feelings of self-worth and self-esteem, which were central to boosting self-confidence, and encouraging progression. The inherent flexibility of the OCN model, in particular the focus on constructing courses based on clear learning outcomes, was seen to be one of the strongest elements of the model. It was:

‘... about learning that is accredited, it’s about chunks of learning, it’s about accrediting and accumulating those chunks of learning, and being able to bank them in such a way that whenever you want to access career opportunities, or you want to access further learning opportunities, that you can go and say, “here’s what I’ve got in my bank”’.

For learners, the fact that they could learn at their own pace, acquiring, and banking, credit in manageable portions, was attractive. Compared with other models of learning which frequently required learners to commit themselves to extended, continuous study, OCN courses could be more easily incorporated into learners’ working and family lives, and presented a less daunting prospect:

‘I think that’s what the Open College Network does so well ... it says let’s take it in bite-sized chunks. Let’s take that bit, and get that out of the way, and then take the next bit.

Despite the successes of the model it was still necessary for other bodies to be made more aware of the nature of the OCN approach, and the value of OCN accreditation:

‘It seems to me that the concept of having your learning accredited based on the learning outcomes that have been set, and whether you can achieve those learning outcomes, is fundamentally sound. It seems to me that being able to evidence that as people move through their learning journey, rather than have to capture evidence through an exam at the end of the journey, is quite appropriate. What we need to do, however, is to make sure that for those who access the OCN accreditation that currency is valued in the same as learning through the traditional route of GCSEs, or ‘O’ levels, or ‘A’ levels.

### **Widening participation**

With his work at the NHSU, and, earlier, with UNISON, Paul Donaghy believes that his central task is to widen participation. He put this in the context not only of the needs and desires of learners, but also in the context of employment patterns and issues, both now and in the future, noting that 80% of the current workforce will still be in employment in a decade’s time, and that organisations like the NHS were major employers. If issues such as productivity were to be addressed, then workplace learning was essential:

‘If we are going to get at those who are most disadvantaged, and meet the target being set by the DfES, at level 2, and by the Department of Employment and Learning at level 2, we have no alternative but to access those people in the workplace. And we also have no alternative but to access those people who work within the public service workforce’.

But many people in the workforce faced barriers to learning:

‘What we know is that if we are going to engage people in that learning journey, there are a number of barriers, quite a number of barriers, and we need to build the solutions to those barriers around the individuals’.

In this context:

'The Open College Network is particularly good at reaching out to those who are most disadvantaged, those who come from areas of social need, those who need their confidence built, their self-esteem built, and need to bank bite-sized learning interventions'.

For widening participation to be successful, it has to take place through the world of work, and the OCN approach is central to successful work based second chance learning. Further, the learning process had the widest possible implications, particularly for Northern Ireland:

'It's actually how we've become disjointed in the worlds of education, and the worlds of work, or employment. Or that whole discussion about what education is, what learning is? The definition that I use for learning is the one that Jacques Delors and UNESCO use, "learning to do the things you're expected to do". But those "to do" skills will only become really effective if they are set alongside the "learning to be" skills, the personal development route, the "learning to know" skills. Because the operator may want to know, "who invented this burnisher, where did it come from, what makes it work?" So, it's about the to do skills, the to be skills, and the to know skills. But, also, the live and work together skills. And I think in terms of Northern Ireland, in terms of a society coming out of conflict, actually to be able to help Catholics to understand that it's healthy that they are different from Protestants, and Protestants to understand that it's healthy to be different from Catholics, and the real trick is how we can live and work together, that's at the core of what we are about in a learning process. [...] It is in that whole wider context that the Open College Network framework, an accreditation system is so important'.

### **Quality and quality assurance**

The issue of quality and quality assurance was, in Paul Donaghy's view, vitally important for providers, the Open College Network, and for learners themselves. At the most basic level, he felt that the OCN was aware that its quality assurance processes not only had to be credible, but had to be seen to be credible. This was important both for learners seeking to progress, and also for the OCN itself. He believed that:

'the OCN enables people to go through a learning journey, and provide them with accredited opportunities to challenge those who have excluded them. And if they don't have that bit of paper, if they don't have something that is robust and quality controlled, well then they are very easily dismissed'.

And,

'I think the Open College Network system has also been very rightly concerned to make sure that it can't be criticised by the traditional education providers. So, the moderation process, the internal moderation process, the external moderation process, is not an optional extra, it is actually critical in terms of ensuring that the quality control mechanisms are there, so that when challenged there is a credible process [...] Open College Network processes tend to be much more open and transparent, and democratic, than others'.

The OCN had met these challenges, and was in a strong position when it came to verifiable quality control mechanisms.

## **Employment skills for disabled people**

### **Introduction**

The providers of this scheme agreed to be interviewed but wished to remain anonymous to protect their learners' interests. The scheme operates in two locations in England and Wales and involves partnership between a private employer, trades unions and local NHS Trusts. The learners have a range of visible and invisible disabilities, including physical disabilities and special educational needs.

The primary objective is to get learners into work for the first time or back into work after various types of setback. The emphasis in the curriculum is on development of work-related skills and career management skills. Some learning is work-based with learners being given paid placements before progressing to permanent jobs in the company or to seeking employment elsewhere with satisfactory references. OCN accreditation is seen as a necessary and vital element in restoring a sense of self-respect to the learners for many of whom 'this is their first successful work and learning experience'. Almost all the provision is at Entry level and it is articulated with informal taster pre-employment courses which are not accredited.

### **Progression and widening participation**

The provision attracts learners who have typically achieved extremely low levels of attainment educationally and have experienced interrupted patterns of short-term employment in unqualified fields of work. There is an issue that some potential learners may need counselling into accepting that their potential for educational progression is limited, but even these learners attest that they have benefited from the experience, often in terms of acquiring basic health and safety awareness and communication skills.

For most learners acquisition of career development skills including how to apply for jobs, and understanding of recruitment processes as well support for development of communication skills is of paramount importance. The providers see themselves as enabled to perform 'miracles' in widening participation, since they are lifting people onto the educational climbing frame who could easily have been completely excluded from it. The providers can also claim an impressive track record in terms of successful learners entering and staying in employment, and coming back into the organisation to help with training their successors.

### **Flexibility**

The providers regularly have to develop programmes which suit the particular needs of individual learners and the OCN unit-based system is perceived as being by far the most suitable way to accredit these activities, being flexible in terms of time spent, capable of negotiated appropriate learning outcomes, and, above all, non-threatening at the point of entry because of the bite-sized units. The programme is, of necessity, very dependent on a high level of provision of one-to-one development sessions and the providers chose to work with OCN since this gave them much greater flexibility to operate efficiently within the constraints which operate for their learners. The one-to-one activity, though labour-intensive in the early stages is seen as a major factor securing retention within the programme and also forming the foundations for learners to progress to other courses at higher levels offered by other providers.

## **Quality**

The provision is seen as a collaborative venture with the OCN developers being regarded as equal partners. Once embarked securely in the programme, learners often over-achieve in terms of the approved learning objectives, and moderation has, therefore, been a 'relatively painless' aspect of the process from the providers' point of view. The support given by OCN staff for developing the 'slightly odd' curriculum for these groups of learners was an essential element in forging a workable and progressive curriculum. The company is very grateful to OCN for being generous with advice and exemplary material for kick-starting the curriculum development process.

The only problematic issue has been around feedback to learners who would like their results to be published almost immediately. In order to keep the learners engaged the providers have a practice of providing immediate oral feedback, but there can be delays of several weeks (or even months) before formal certificates are issued. Even so, the location of these programmes within a credit framework is regarded as particularly important for securing the employment progression of the participants and the English branch of the company is hopeful that articulation with the Framework for Achievement will help with the currency and transferability of the credit in the way that articulation with the CQFW has for colleagues in Wales.

## **'The Skilled Advisor' Programme Training in Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) Go4/Connexions, Devon and Cornwall**

### **Introduction**

The Skilled Advisor was developed from an earlier entry level qualification for those involved with information and advice about learning and work. Its purpose was to provide knowledge, understanding and development of the core skills needed in IAG. The programme was designed to be a confidence builder and to be a specific professional development for the many frontline staff providing IAG as part of their work. It was intended for those for whom an NVQ at level 3 or 4 was inappropriate or who would not be able to meet those standards due to the limitations of their job role. Tom Harvey, the Go4 Training Officer, who had been involved in this provision from the outset was interviewed on 17 March 2005 at his base in Launceston, Cornwall.

The programme consists of three units and is accredited by OCN South West. A portfolio of evidence is submitted for assessment for each unit and credit can be awarded at either level 2 or 3. The first two units are mandatory and are taught together; unit 3 is optional and can only be taken after successful completion of units 1 and 2. It has still to be approved.

The first unit is titled 'Handling Information' and includes an understanding of listening skills and questioning techniques, an understanding of client needs, familiarisation with information resources, how to deal with information enquiries, how to provide relevant accessible information to clients, and the importance of referral and networking. Unit 2, 'Advising on Information', includes an introduction to current codes of practice and relevant legislation, recognising and overcoming client barriers to learning and work, mediating and interpreting information for clients and colleagues, identifying entry levels and barriers to learning and work, understanding of self in current job role and familiarity with the need for performance review, and making appropriate referrals. Unit 3, when approved, will provide an introduction to initial guidance, building on the content of the previous two units, and focusing on the transition from advice to guidance.

### **Progression**

The Skilled Advisor was designed quite specifically as an end in its own right rather than as a stepping stone to further study – the skills it was intended to develop were those needed by those working in the broad area of IAG, often as frontline staff or on the periphery. However, it has proved a very effective base for those wanting to go on to take an NVQ level 3 or 4 Advice and Guidance qualification and a number of those who have completed the Skilled Advisor have subsequently followed this route. As the programme has become better known and its contribution recognised there is evidence of a greater acknowledgement within the IAG Partnership of its value which in turn has resulted in enhanced employment prospects for those with the qualification:

'It has helped staff to remain in post and also prepare for internal promotion opportunities especially in the voluntary and community sector.'

## **Flexibility**

The flexibility inherent in the unit-based structure of the provision was a key factor in the success of the course. It had enabled a specialist programme for a newly emerging professional field to be developed at the same time as providing the possibility of new or amended units in the future as required. The fact that it was possible to cater for a range of abilities within the same programme had been important, as had the fact that rather than having to take a course 'off the shelf' the course had been tailored to the needs of the targeted learners. The combination of a 'bite sized' approach to learning and a non-threatening assessment regime were identified as key features in contributing to the success of the programme.

There was one particularly noteworthy way in which the flexibility of the provision itself was evident – in the diversity of the groups which had made use of the Skilled Advisor. Apart from those who might be generally identified with IAG activities (and for whom the programme was devised) the range of others who had expressed an interest and had picked it up was striking and included the prison service (prison officers, orderlies and education staff), NHS Trusts (for managers to provide better support for their own staff), and even the hotel and catering trade (where there are particular workforce development issues relating to casual and seasonal employment).

## **Widening Participation**

The flexibility of the provision in meeting the needs of learners in quite different contexts has meant that the Skilled Advisor has been taken up by those with previous educational achievements as well as those with none. As noted above under 'progression', the qualification was devised for those who needed it in a work-based setting. However, in practice this has meant a significant widening participation dimension as well, and many learners have been re-engaged with education and acquired a qualification for the first time:

'The course has engaged volunteer workers in small voluntary and community organisations who would otherwise have no formal qualifications.'

At the same time it has provided a useful addition for qualified staff who do not have specific accreditation relating to IAG work. The conclusion to be drawn from this example is that given sufficient flexibility in the design and structure of the provision, even a qualification designed primarily with a work-based emphasis can nonetheless make a significant contribution to widening participation.

## **Quality**

The Skilled Advisor grew out of an earlier OCN accredited course, 'Here to Help'. The OCN provided much practical support in this process and the ongoing encouragement and involvement of OCN once the new course was up and running was acknowledged.

No issues were raised relating to quality assurance. The processes in place were believed to be rigorous and, in terms of moderation, to have become more robust over time.

## **Employment skills for disabled people**

### **Introduction**

The providers of this scheme agreed to be interviewed but wished to remain anonymous to protect their learners' interests. The scheme operates in two locations in England and Wales and involves partnership between a private employer, trades unions and local NHS Trusts. The learners have a range of visible and invisible disabilities, including physical disabilities and special educational needs.

The primary objective is to get learners into work for the first time or back into work after various types of setback. The emphasis in the curriculum is on development of work-related skills and career management skills. Some learning is work-based with learners being given paid placements before progressing to permanent jobs in the company or to seeking employment elsewhere with satisfactory references. OCN accreditation is seen as a necessary and vital element in restoring a sense of self-respect to the learners for many of whom 'this is their first successful work and learning experience'. Almost all the provision is at Entry level and it is articulated with informal taster pre-employment courses which are not accredited.

### **Progression and widening participation**

The provision attracts learners who have typically achieved extremely low levels of attainment educationally and have experienced interrupted patterns of short-term employment in unqualified fields of work. There is an issue that some potential learners may need counselling into accepting that their potential for educational progression is limited, but even these learners attest that they have benefited from the experience, often in terms of acquiring basic health and safety awareness and communication skills.

For most learners acquisition of career development skills including how to apply for jobs, and understanding of recruitment processes as well as support for development of communication skills is of paramount importance. The providers see themselves as enabled to perform 'miracles' in widening participation, since they are lifting people onto the educational climbing frame who could easily have been completely excluded from it. The providers can also claim an impressive track record in terms of successful learners entering and staying in employment, and coming back into the organisation to help with training their successors.

### **Flexibility**

The providers regularly have to develop programmes which suit the particular needs of individual learners and the OCN unit-based system is perceived as being by far the most suitable way to accredit these activities, being flexible in terms of time spent, capable of negotiated appropriate learning outcomes, and, above all, non-threatening at the point of entry because of the bite-sized units. The programme is, of necessity, very dependent on a high level of provision of one-to-one development sessions and the providers chose to work with OCN since this gave them much greater flexibility to operate efficiently within the constraints which operate for their learners. The one-to-one activity, though labour-intensive in the early stages is seen as a major factor securing retention within the programme and also forming the foundations for learners to progress to other courses at higher levels offered by other providers.

## **Quality**

The provision is seen as a collaborative venture with the OCN developers being regarded as equal partners. Once embarked securely on the programme, learners often over-achieve in terms of the approved learning objectives, and moderation has, therefore, been a 'relatively painless' aspect of the process from the providers' point of view. The main issue has been around feedback to learners who would like their results to be published almost immediately. In order to keep the learners engaged the providers have a practice of providing immediate oral feedback, but there can be delays of several weeks (or even months) before formal certificates are issued. Even so, the location of these programmes within a credit framework is regarded as particularly important for securing the employment progression of the participants and the English branch of the company is hopeful that articulation with the Framework for Achievement will help with the currency and transferability of the credit in the way that articulation with the CQFW has for colleagues in Wales.

## **WAVE Trauma Centre'**

### **Belfast**

#### **(i) The provider perspective**

##### **Introduction**

Margaret Riddels, the Trauma Training Co-ordinator at the WAVE (Women Against Violent Empowerment) Trauma Centre, Belfast, was interviewed on 8 March 2005. The WAVE project was founded in the early 1990s, as one of the first cross-community voluntary initiatives in Northern Ireland. It was initially aimed at women widowed in the 'Troubles', or traumatised by Troubles-related violence. Later, men suffering similar trauma were also included, and, in 1995, the WAVE project began to receive government funding, and later funding from the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation. WAVE's mission statement is: 'Helping people bereaved or traumatised as a result of the Troubles'. In recent years, the remit of WAVE has expanded to include those traumatised by other experiences, such as domestic violence. In addition to its original centre in Belfast, WAVE also has centres in Armagh, Omagh, Ballymoney, Derry/Londonderry, and Ballymena.

All WAVE training is accredited by the NIOCN, and WAVE offers six courses:

- Volunteering
- Listening/Communicating skills
- Grief, trauma, and the helping relationship – empowerment through achievement
- Compassion fatigue – taking care of the carer
- Trauma and addiction – empowerment through achievement
- Storytelling – a therapeutic tool in the helping relationship

The first three courses deliver Level 2 accreditation, and the last two provide Level 3 accreditation. In addition, WAVE offers a diploma in trauma studies, which is accredited by Queen's University, Belfast. WAVE is the main provider in Northern Ireland of trauma courses and training.

##### **Progression**

Progression features as a key aim of the providers, alongside to the primary aims of building confidence, counselling, and trauma recovery. These aims are seen to be mutually dependent, with, for example, confidence-building being seen as a necessary step to progression in terms of employment and further education.

The Bloomfield Report, which identified the goal of empowering communities and individuals as a key aim of adult education, has been an important influence on WAVE's programmes. The training co-ordinator sees WAVE's courses as providing a way back into education and employment for trauma victims, many of whom have often been outside of both for a number of years. Confidence-building is an essential step in helping learners progress. In addition, trainers and staff, both from WAVE and other community groups, take WAVE courses in order to enhance their career profiles.

The 'Grief, trauma and the helping relationship' course offered by WAVE is completed by all of WAVE's staff as part of their employment requirement, and by many trauma victims. In 2004/05, over 300 trauma victims completed this accredited

course which runs for ten weeks, with one three hour meeting per week. Learners have work to complete between sessions. Accreditation is by means of internal and NIOCN moderated portfolios. Completed portfolios include three assignments, a structured learning journal based on each session, and a personal journal reflecting the learner's response to the course. The course content stressed transferable skills, in addition to trauma-specific learning. Successful learners are awarded Level 2 accreditation.

Margaret Riddels provided an example of a young woman who had left school at an early age, and had experienced no formal education since then. Her successful completion of the 'Grief, trauma and the helping relationship' course greatly boosted her confidence in her learning capabilities, and led to degree study:

'I had a female who, because of her background, had to leave school at a very young age. And it was through doing these courses that gave her the confidence to progress to another diploma course which was recognised by the university, and got an interview [...] and the fact that she had done, at the interview, our 'Grief and Trauma' that actually swung the pendulum. And the interesting thing was that this was someone who had acquired a great love of learning, and actually did better on the course than people who had degrees, who had prior degrees.'

Nonetheless, there was a major issue regarding progression and WAVE's NIOCN-accredited courses. WAVE had established a university-accredited Diploma in Trauma Studies, and had helped to develop both a BA and an MA in Trauma Studies at Queen's University (with hopes of a PhD. in future years). However, their NIOCN-accredited courses were not recognised as a qualification for university admission: learners used their NIOCN-accredited courses to good effect in terms of their personal statements but successful completion of the courses did not provide an entry route to university.

### **Flexibility**

Accreditation was essential to the success of WAVE's courses:

'I think that the only way a course is given any credibility is by it being accredited by a recognised organisation like the Open College Network. Standards have to be reached.'

NIOCN-accredited courses run by WAVE are built around learning sessions of between one and three hours apiece. Some of the courses run over eight weeks, others run for ten weeks. The stress is on relatively short learning periods, and between-session work by the learner. There is an awareness that for returners to education who might have had been out of formal education for a long period, the 'bite-sized' nature of the courses is attractive:

'Our courses are at different levels, and certainly people are a bit apprehensive at first, but there is good support.'

WAVE is in the process of attempting to extend the accredited short course approach, in order to attract even more non-traditional learners:

‘And we are now looking ... at the very short courses, one or two day courses, at a basic level. To give those courses some credibility [through the award of credit].’

Completion of semi-structured journals, and portfolios, are the main requirements for accreditation. The learning sessions are scheduled to make them most accessible to learners.

### **Widening participation**

Trauma victim learners frequently shared a background profile. Typically, they had been out of education and paid employment for long periods of time. Given the background of WAVE, women predominated, but both men and women learners frequently possessed few, if any, formal educational qualifications:

‘We would have, for example, women and men who have been out of education for a long time. It’s a way back into coping with learning skills as well. And they are able to build up a portfolio, and I do know that people have been able to bring that to employers to back up what they are saying, “right, I haven’t been working, but I have been taking a course”’.

For many, completion of a WAVE course represented their first successful educational experience, and, in this context, the nationally recognised nature of the NIOCN accredited courses was seen as being particularly important. NIOCN accreditation was a ‘seal of approval’ on the courses being run by WAVE and this was something that both employers and other educational providers could be made aware of.

In addition to trauma victims, WAVE staff, and the staff of voluntary organisations also take WAVE courses. For all WAVE staff, including secretarial and administrative staff, it is seen as essential that they possess the necessary skills to deal with trauma victims. In addition, staff from voluntary groups whose work brings them into contact with trauma victims also take WAVE courses:

‘All our own staff have to do the “Grief, trauma, and helping relationship”. That particular course has been, to date, our most popular of all [our courses]. When we talk about trauma, it could be road accidents, domestic violence – we have people from Women’s Aid – it can be sexual abuse’.

‘We would get, for example, people from Victim Support, and other organisations like that’.

### **Quality and quality assurance**

The quality of the courses, and the high standards of quality control, were seen by learners to be important:

‘I think it is very important for the learners, because it ensures standardisation of teaching is closely monitored as well, and we are queried on how we carry that out’.

Evaluation, standardisation, and quality control were believed to be of a high standard across all the courses operated by the WAVE centres throughout Northern Ireland. The external moderators typically spend two days evaluating learner

journals and portfolios. In addition, the WAVE staff were involved in a continuing review of all courses, drawing on provider experience and learner needs to adapt and improve their trauma courses. The links between WAVE and the external moderator were also good:

'When we first of all ask for a course, it is closely monitored, closely examined. I have an external moderator, a moderator, who I'm in very close contact with. I'm the internal moderator and another person is another internal monitor [...] Over 300 in the last year did our courses. So, I've very close links with the external moderator, and also everything is evaluated by the Open College Network as well'.

**'WAVE Trauma Centre'**  
**Belfast**  
**(ii) The learner perspective**

**Introduction**

All WAVE staff are required to take the 'Grief, Trauma and the Helping Relationship' course. This applies to non-training staff, as it is believed that they need training relevant to dealing with the issues that trauma victims face, given that they will come into contact with trauma victims during their work at the WAVE centres.

A member of the non-training staff at WAVE was interviewed on 8 March 2005. Shortly after starting work at WAVE, Belfast, she took the 'Grief, Trauma and the Helping Relationship' course. Prior to being employed by WAVE, she had spent twenty years in the retail sector, and, although she was a native of Belfast, she had lived for most of that time outside of Northern Ireland. She felt that it was essential for her employment at WAVE to take the course, as she frequently came into contact with trauma sufferers at the centre.

**The learner's needs**

The learner felt that completing the course had given her two essential attributes – 'confidence and understanding'. This, she felt, had empowered her, making her feel that she had further skills necessary for her job at WAVE:

'I felt that I lacked skills to deal with people, on a daily basis, who were coming into the centre, and [...] knowing how to be able to deal with these people, with a sympathetic ear, and have an understanding of what they were going through, and see how they would come out the other end, and for me, personally, to be able to deal with it as I was going along [...], and there was a need for me to understand the boundaries that would be involved with that.'

She felt that it was 'a fantastic course'. It had, in her words, given her 'a real grounding in the issues', and provided her with knowledge and understanding that was 'essential to the job'. In particular, it had enabled her to understand about the importance of boundary-setting between her and WAVE members, providing her with the necessary skills to deal with this difficult issue. Further, it gave her 'greater understanding of, and empathy for' the trauma victims.

**Accreditation and progression**

As a worker at WAVE, the learner felt that she had witnessed the benefits of WAVE's NIOCN accredited courses for the WAVE members:

'With members, it is, "well, I've achieved this, this is my certificate, it is accredited so it is recognised." And it has encouraged them to go on then, to take other courses with the OCN, or with other colleges.'

She felt that the WAVE courses addressed vital, personal, issues for learners, and also built self-confidence, and provided them with the skills and desire for further education:

'It's a first step for them on the road to recovery, and a lot of them will have gone on then, and ones who were in the class I was in two years ago, went on to take other courses'.

'I just see the benefit for the people when they finish it, and then go on to other things'.

'Once they've left it, there is a real craving to go on further, and a real keenness, "what are [you] offering next with the OCN?"

She knew of people who had found that their NIOCN-accredited WAVE courses had proved essential in employment interviews, and felt that her own CV had been enhanced by her having successfully taken a WAVE course.

### **Concluding remarks**

The learner was entirely positive and enthusiastic in her assessment of the course. She summed up her feelings about the WAVE courses:

'When you see the results, it's very good' ... 'I couldn't sing its praise loud enough. It's fantastic. I've seen lots of people who have gone into courses, I'm talking about members now, who have gone into courses with a great deal of lack of confidence, and come out of the other end thinking, "well, I've done that. It has not only taught me about myself and my grieving process, it has taught me how to deal with other people, and it has now encouraged me to go on, and look at other things I could do outside of here'.