



Whole people matter

The importance of continuing the spiritual, ethical, social and cultural development of each learner

A way of approaching citizenship

A paper to promote discussion and reflection

Introduction

This discussion document is addressed to decision-makers and opinion-formers (including Her Majesty's Government, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, the Learning and Skills Councils, Ofsted and the Adult Learning Inspectorate), management in further education colleges, and the faith communities.

It considers why it is important for those who manage learning to seek to address the continuing development of the whole person. It highlights the questions and the issues this raises for

- the curriculum and assessment
- institutional leadership and management
- an effective approach to citizenship

It is based on work recently and currently carried out in Further Education (FE) colleges, and published in an accompanying volume under the same title.



Rationale

1.1 The approach

The highest quality learning develops the whole person; it is person-centred or holistic. This generally-understood approach has been given a new emphasis in recent statements:

The best education is far more than the acquisition of knowledge, skills and qualifications. It also helps [...] to develop attitudes and values that provide the basis for a successful and rewarding life in the home, at work and in the community. Young people in this new century should have self-confidence, the ability to be self-critical, the drive to take on new challenges and take risks and the capacity to relate to others in positive, constructive ways.

14-19 extending opportunities, raising standards DfES 2002

Learners need to be able to make sense of their lives and to make connections between their values, their education and training, their work, their communities and their leisure. This understanding and these skills cannot be compartmentalised and do not operate in isolation. They are not developed in specific parts of the curriculum or only at certain levels of study. They are not discrete. This approach requires the spiritual, ethical, social, cultural and personal development of each individual to be pursued whatever the learning programme.

It has been a particular strength of FE in recent years to focus on the individual. The Inclusive Learning Quality Initiative, for example, further promoted the practice of seeking to establish the best possible match between each learner's needs and his or her learning programme. There has been much research into flexibility, responsiveness and inclusivity. In FE colleges, where there are no prescribed Key Stages (as in schools) and no predetermined level (as in Higher Education) much effort is spent on trying to ensure that curricular provision (in its broadest definition) is appropriate - and challenging - for each learner. Significant resources are allocated to supporting the individual. Consider the importance attached to admissions procedures, personal tutors, learning support and student services, in addition to the impact of the subject specialists working within the parameters of cross-college learning policies and value statements. The whole person matters.

'I'm more interested in developing people than pushing them through educational hoops.'

(Member of staff, City College)

'We want to create a country which has a heart, a head and a soul.'

Ivan Lewis, MP, as Minister for Young People and Learning at a DfES conference on Citizenship held in Leicester, 6 March 2002

1.2 Why it matters

In the search for effective and high quality learning, the importance of the learner's attitude to study and motivation cannot be overemphasised. The more learning addresses the needs of the whole person, and the more it helps the individual to make sense of his or her life in all its dimensions, the greater the engagement of the learner with the experience. Indeed, it is also more likely that the learner will continue to pursue learning. Research has shown that the commitment engendered by such engagement prompts learners to overcome many practical barriers to learning.

Success, a positive, enabling and challenging experience, as the maxim tells us, breeds success and those who work in education have seen the difference it makes to an individual's attitudes and life. It is in all our interests that we seek to increase achievement.

Issues and Questions

2.1 The commitment to and understanding of the holistic approach – Is the person-centred approach valued?

It [learning] helps to make ours a civilised society, develops the spiritual side of our lives and promotes active citizenship. It enables people to play a full part in their community. It strengthens the family, the neighbourhood and consequently the nation. It helps to fulfil our potential and opens doors to a love of music, art and literature. This is why we value learning for its own sake as well as for the equality of opportunity it brings.

The Learning Age, Department for Education and Employment, February 1998, the Secretary of State's introduction

It is important that such statements, and the recent emphasis on developing and stretching people to reach their full potential, are perceived as a real commitment. The focus is on things which are not always easily measurable and inspected; they cannot be assessed quantitatively. But it is an approach which underpins striving for the highest quality. It has implications for

- the national framework, direction and priorities for post-16 learning – which must not concentrate on the utilitarian, materialistic or narrow
- the writing of specifications – which must make the approach transparent and include indications of the importance of the holistic
- assessment – which must offer opportunities for reflection, analysis, and demonstration of an understanding of the multi-faceted nature of topics and issues
- inspection – which should be sensitive to ethos and encourage cross-college approaches to effective learning
- college leadership and management – in their development of value statements, effective learning policies and the establishing of structures
- faith communities – in their support of learners and learning provision, both locally and nationally, and their contribution to the debate

'It's about asking questions and showing you don't know all the answers.'

Chaplain, North Lindsey College

2.2 Turning commitment into reality – Are college / LSC / government statements working?

Statements and policies are almost worthless unless implemented. It is important to convince all involved that the implied commitment must be evident in the service provided. Winning hearts and minds is crucial. Key areas in which this approach will have an impact include:

- the organisational ethos – What strikes the visitor, the learner, the employee on entry and when working within the service? Are people listened to and cared for? Is diversity encouraged and respected? Is success celebrated? Does the student feel he or she matters more than the college's statistics?

'It's all about the whole person being valued. It's about ethos, and encouraging them as human beings.'

Member of staff, John Leggott College

- the organisational structures and procedures – How are people valued? Do staff feel affirmed? Are there cross-college and cross-curriculum responsibilities, emphasising the holistic approach? Is debate about how people learn encouraged and where is the pedagogic leadership to be found? What are the institutional requirements when departments choose a specification; is the holistic approach encouraged?
- teachers – How enthusiastic and competent in their own specialisms are they? Many find it relatively easy to see how they can contribute to the personal development of the learner in their own subject, but are efforts made to generate an even greater awareness of opportunities for a holistic approach? How are those who lack confidence supported and encouraged?
- the training and development of staff – For teachers, this should start with their initial training. Are the inclusive and effective learning debates being used? Do those with counselling skills find this approach easier? How is staff induction managed? Are those with a reflective and critical approach (this could include the chaplains) working alongside other staff?
- the allocation of resources – particularly people. This brings significant costs in terms of time and money. Are senior teacher practitioners felt to be important (see Suffolk College)? Are specific initiatives funded (e.g. Suffolk Interfaith Resource Centre)? How is best practice shared and promoted? To what extent is the sharing of materials and resources encouraged? Are staff required to attend specific development activities or are they given the impression it is optional? Have resources such as the DfES Self-Advocacy Action Pack been explored? Is time allocated to exploring a variety of approaches and initiatives, e.g. the ASDAN approach at City College, Norwich?
- capitalising on links with the community – Are those agencies, businesses and services which can contribute to curriculum and learning experiences encouraged, sought out and valued?

2.3 The integrated approach – How coherent is the learning experience?

Is the current conflict for some staff recognised? Some see a dilemma between addressing the needs of the whole person and preparing learners for an examination or specific assessment. The logic says that if this approach is fundamentally important then it should be apparent in all work. Just as students find it hard to believe key skills matter if they are only ever encountered as 'add-on' and separate, so personal development cannot be viewed or undertaken as a discrete activity. It has to have a context and substance. This throws more weight on the importance of those specifications which enable learners to work in this way.

2.4 Citizenship – Is it sufficiently holistic?

Considerable overlap is seen by some between the holistic approach advocated and the post-16 Citizenship matrix (as in the 'Crick Report', *Citizenship For 16-19 Year Olds In Education And Training*, Further Education Funding Council/Department for Education and Employment, 2000). Have staff mapped the current work and operations of the college on to the matrix:

- within subject specifications?
- within tutorial activities – including the work of learning advisers and mentors, and the use of individual learning plans (ILPs)?
- within extra-curricular and non-examination activities and opportunities?

There was little doubt amongst the staff we spoke to in colleges that the holistic, integrated approach should meet the needs of a Citizenship specification. Of itself, Citizenship did not contribute as fully to the spiritual, ethical, social, cultural and personal development as was thought desirable. It was thought that to make it 'free-standing' would often be to de-value it and to miss opportunities. It was felt to be more than focussing on content and topical, big issues. The preferred model leads to learning becoming transferable. Students are encouraged to reflect on the wider nature of moral agreements and disagreements, learning the language of moral debate and understanding the values embedded in it.

2.5 Compulsion or entitlement? Should learners have a choice?

Are learners deemed to be autonomous? If something is so valuable that everyone has to experience it, how do we ensure this happens in a positive way? Students we spoke to did not want compulsory RE or General Studies, but did want current affairs, and to think about exploring issues to do with the war (then seen as imminent) and the Middle East. They found assessment got in the way of what they wanted to do. 'The exam papers are the problem. Done well it [compulsory General Studies] could give you valuable insight'. 'Enjoyment matters.' Motivation is enhanced by a sense of having chosen. The given curriculum may well have failed a learner up to 16; we must now build on the learner's strengths and interests. The integrated approach, in which all learning contributes in an appropriate way to the learner's personal and full development, removes the negative impact of the compulsory subject or course from the equation.

2.6 The role of chaplains in colleges and faith communities in colleges. Is their potential fully realised?

The partnership agenda has prompted colleges and faith communities to consider more carefully what distinctive gifts each partner brings to the table. Each knows that lack of clarity results in wasted opportunities. This project has demonstrated the benefit to learners where partners genuinely seek to work together. These partnerships work in many different ways – individual staff making connections with their interests outside the college, churches and faith communities offering chaplaincy support, and working with the college on community-based learning programmes.

On the whole, colleges have good student support services. Although dealing with people at the raw moments of their lives gives a particular quality to the chaplains' understanding of 'whole people', simply to see chaplaincy as crisis counselling underplays its real value. Similarly, simply to see partnership with faith communities as offering access to plant, or volunteer placements, misses the point.

Are chaplains and faith communities encouraged to act as catalysts for *learning* in the college, to prompt questions and to help people *reflect* on their experience? Do we sufficiently recognise the need to make time and space to take stock? Simply asking the question about what has been learnt through an experience – plotting activity on the citizenship matrix, reviewing the term's work, reflecting on the placement – makes all the difference. The training of chaplains means that such skills are well-developed and valued. Are we making enough of it?

"Colleges have become fragmented. So how do you teach citizenship in this fragmented context – when citizenship is about community, and living and working together in a mixed community?"

FE Chaplain

In an increasingly fragmented environment, issues of rootedness and community, human identity, meaning and purpose become all the more significant. Integrating explicit connections through local faith communities/college partnerships at the appropriate points within mainstream curriculum can help learners articulate many of the values underlying citizenship. Such values are of real importance to faith groups, and the networks (both local and global) with whom they work. How might these be better integrated into college life?

2.7 Labelling – Where do words get in the way?

In this debate it has proved important to watch our language! Some words can be off-putting and divert people from a consideration of the fundamental issues. Is 'person-centred' more acceptable to some than 'spiritual'? Was the Peace Tree more acceptable at Myerscough College because it was not called a Prayer Tree? How sensitive are we to the reactions of all those involved?

Ultimately there may well be a difference between the ideal and the practical, between the theory and what actually happens on the ground. However, underpinning policies and frameworks should unequivocally support the holistic approach. Learners are entitled to nothing less.

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