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The impact of learning mentors: Leicester College

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Brief description

Leicester College has learning mentors attached to curriculum areas to improve learners' achievements. They provide a highly effective and extensive range of specialist support for learners and deal with a wide range of issues from emotional well-being and complex support needs to more routine matters.

Overview – the college's message

'Learning Mentors were introduced into the college in 2000 to raise the achievement of level 2 learners whose circumstances made them vulnerable or who were at risk of underperforming. The mentors give first-class support to learners with a broad range of challenges and issues. This mentoring support has had a beneficial impact on the learners, improving their chances to complete their course successfully. Learning mentors work closely with teachers, support staff and tutors to ensure that they meet learners' overall needs.'



Dr Don Brooks, Deputy Principal

The good practice in detail

In January 2011, [Ofsted judged](#) the overall effectiveness of the college to be 'very good with many outstanding features'. Inspectors judged the provision of care, guidance and support to be outstanding.

The system for learning mentors to work within specific curriculum areas to provide an extensive range of specialist support for learners at all levels of study, was introduced in 2003. Learning mentors are 'front-line' support workers and learners benefit from quick access to their support within their curriculum areas. Mentors help learners to overcome barriers that may otherwise hinder their progress on their course. These barriers range from problems such as homelessness, financial difficulties or a challenge connected to their studies.

Learning mentors aim to ensure that students become more independent in their learning. As this is achieved, the support provided by learning mentors is reduced and learners develop a greater level of confidence.

Learning mentors have a positive impact on learners' achievements. In 2011/12, they supported 1,660 learners and counselling support was provided to 356. The success and retention rates of learners receiving additional learning support in the College is similar to those for other learners. Their retention rate in 2011/12 was 90%, a 1% increase on 2010/11, and in line with the college average.

Helping more learners complete their programmes and achieve

Learning mentors are particularly skilled at responding rapidly to any issues learners encounter and they provide highly effective interventions to support them. As a result, the proportion of learners with mentors who leave their courses is very low. Tutors also work with learning mentors to support the learners who are deemed to be 'at risk' of underperforming. This personal support from tutors is strong, with staff giving time beyond that timetabled to help students who are having difficulties with assignments and assessments.



Specialised support to meet learners' diverse needs

Learning Mentors are well trained in a good range of specialist areas relevant to many of the college's learners. For instance, they receive training in how to deal with issues such as forced marriage and 'honour'-based violence, safeguarding and drug and alcohol misuse.

Personal tutors also meet with learners on a one-to-one basis to monitor progress and identify any problems such as poor attendance and punctuality and to complete their individual learning plans which includes setting and reviewing SMART targets. Tutors work with learning mentors to support learners who are deemed to be 'at risk' of failing to complete their course.

Specific enrichment activities are made available to groups of learners who may face particular barriers, such as refugees and asylum seekers, young people who are looked after, learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and international students.

Linda Burman, Student Support Manager remarked: 'Support is also available in the college for young parents who attend the college. In 2010/11, 52 young parents were supported and 83% of these completed their course.'

Targeted support is provided for young people who are either in the care of the local authority or who are care leavers. This support is particularly effective through the links that have been made with the various agencies in the local authority involved in supporting this



group of young people. In 2010/11, 61 looked after children were supported and 72% completed their courses. David Jackson, the Head of Student Services is a member of the city-wide Steering Group for Looked after Children. Learning mentors had a key role in supporting this work.

'The College has suffered from cuts to enrichment funding, but we have shielded students from the impact and have continued to offer enrichment activities', says Don Brooks. 'These are important to many of our students, particularly those who come

from deprived or disadvantaged backgrounds, as these individuals have fewer opportunities to acquire additional skills and experience apart from what they pick up in college.' Learning mentors sometimes accompany learners on enrichment activities and they provide invaluable support in helping learners benefit fully from the full range of activities on offer.

The college's background

Leicester College is the only general further education college in the city of Leicester and is one of the largest colleges in the country. The college has three main campuses and offers provision in over 80 community venues and, in partnership with others, provides training for employees of over 1,000 businesses. In 2011/12, over 26,000 learners studied at the college. Provision is offered in all 15 subject sector areas, although most enrolments are in vocational areas. It also provides higher education courses.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

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