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Outstanding partnership arrangements: Telford College of Arts and Technology

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Brief description

The college has a strong tradition of exemplary partnership working with a wide range of organisations which have shaped the mainstream curriculum to benefit learners. Targeted projects have met the needs of disadvantaged individuals.

Overview – the provider’s message



‘True partnership working is about looking at the wider needs of the town, employers and learners and not the individual needs of institutions. The college is committed to collaboration with partners to ensure that our training prepares people for real jobs. The success of the college in doing this and our extensive links with employers is a result of our investment, in time and resources, over the past 20 years.’

Jan Ellis, Principal

The good practice in detail

Twenty years ago, the college recognised that partnership work was a very effective way of ensuring that the provision met the varying needs of employers and the local community. Hard work since then has produced some spectacular results. For many years now, the college has had outstanding and extensive partnership arrangements covering all aspects of its work. Over half of the college’s turnover is derived from work with employers through the Directorate of Commercial Development and Training. The Ofsted inspection in May 2010 reported that: ‘The college has particularly effective initiatives to promote social inclusion

and widen participation. It is involved in a substantial number of innovative and sustainable regeneration and health promotion projects. These engage and empower local people.'

On winning the coveted Queen's Anniversary Award for 'delivering economically important skills on employers' premises in 2007, Ann Griffiths, from the college's Commercial Development and Training arm, said: 'I feel this most prestigious award has recognised the strong and vital links which have been forged with, not only our local industries, but large and small businesses nationally.' And Minister Liam Byrne, MP for Birmingham Hodge Hill and Minister for the West Midlands stated that: 'This transformation hasn't happened by accident. It is because institutions like Telford College of Arts and Technology have taken the ball and run. The highest performing Train to Gain provider in the region, it was judged outstanding in all areas in its 2007 Ofsted inspection and was one of only six colleges nationally to receive a Queen's Award for Further Education in 2007.'

Partnerships with employers and the local community

Partnership arrangements with employers are excellent. The college contracts with many major organisations to deliver their training including Tesco, GKN, Caterpillar, Heinz and many other household names. As a result, over 42,000 students have gained qualifications that they might otherwise not have achieved, and they have developed business skills that have enabled their careers to progress. Countless others have had new avenues of learning opened to them. The close working relationship with employers has also helped to shape the curriculum for the campus-based students.

The college takes time to forge strong working relationships with employers and to understand the company's business priorities and issues from the outset of the partnership. It provides bespoke training packages and works closely with employees prior to delivering these packages. And it employs staff who are industry-credible and visit the employer regularly. Where technology is appropriate for the delivery of the qualification then it is used.

An excellent example of the benefit for students is 'Patrick', an employee who swept the floors of a local company. Patrick was illiterate when college staff first met him, when they were training all employees in his company. He was encouraged to learn basic life skills.



Taught to read and write, he then progressed through 10 different qualifications becoming literate, numerate and IT trained in the process. Currently working as a supervisor in the same company, he is now able to write reports and presentations with confidence.

The contribution made by the college to the wider community is also substantial, ranging from the realisation of educational goals for individuals to improvements in profitability and staff training for businesses. In this way, the college has played a vital role in improving the profitability of its client companies. Valve Train Components, for example, recorded an overall saving of over £20,000 after completing a three month course on its premises, focusing on productivity, problem solving and continuous improvement techniques. Palethorpes estimated that manufacturing efficiencies, resulting from a training programme saved them around £400,000 per year. Customer service levels, health and safety standards and employee morale were all improved as well. The Managing Director of Palethorpes recalls that: 'Throughout the whole process, the team from the college gave us all the

support and guidance we could have wished for, and went the extra mile to ensure the success of the project.'

The college also promotes enterprise with local businesses. For example, a joint initiative with a local hotel allows students to run a full commercial beauty salon which benefits students and the partner alike.

The Whitehouse is one of Telford's premier hotels, and has had a Beauty Salon on the premises for many years. Over recent times the beauty rooms have been empty - until the hair and beauty department saw an opportunity! Karen Parkinson, Head of School, along with Director of Leisure, Business and Professional Studies, Colin Walker saw the potential to offer newly qualified beauty specialists the opportunity to work in a prestigious spa by opening one of their own.



Providing students with the opportunity to work at Lilly's enables them to bridge the gap between perfecting the skills required to be a beauty specialist at Telford College and gaining invaluable experience of working in a commercial salon. Salon Manager, Jennifer Mason, has a wealth of experience, not only as a qualified beauty therapist, but also as an expert in nail enhancements and advanced massage techniques.

GKN Sankey faced the prospect of losing 250 jobs from one department when a major manufacturing contract was lost to an Eastern European competitor. Soon after, the company won a new contract that used a different production process and a programme of retraining was required.

In response, the college secured funding from the Regional Development Agency to set up a training facility within the company, in which those employees who otherwise faced redundancy could retrain. In addition, efficiency measures were brought in, which reduced the number of shifts required for the work from three to two, thereby allowing the company to use the third shift for work on an additional contract. As a result of this initiative, 1,200 jobs were retained within the company, the labour force learned new skills and the company secured new business.

Dave Gill, a director at the college, says: 'Our partnership work is derived from a genuine commitment to dealing with Borough-wide issues, such as worklessness. The problems faced by individuals may be many and complex. We adopt a holistic approach which translates into college staff working with partners who are primarily concerned with mental health issues or accommodation problems. Training for employment may come later for the individual.'

The college has been involved in community based learning for more than a decade and has consulted widely with local residents to ascertain needs in response to local issues and the aspirations of local people. One of several actions resulting from ongoing needs assessment was the development and delivery of an OCN course entitled 'EPIC – Empowering People, Inspiring Communities'. The course enrolled local street representatives and other residents providing them with the skills necessary to influence the local authority in its plans to regenerate the Woodside Estate. Two of the original students are now directors of the Park Lane Centre.

Another good example of a well-established and highly successful community partnership is the college's work with the Community Health and Enterprise Centre (CHEC) in Madeley. The aim of CHEC is to provide advice and information about a wide variety of services ranging from health promotions to community regeneration. The project has its own library and on-site crèche.

Learning opportunities are provided for people who have not been engaged in learning for some time. The aim is to encourage people to raise their aspirations and become lifelong learners. The learning takes place in a non-threatening environment, at a pace that is suited to their needs. It also has a positive impact on their health and well-being by improving their access to information, advice and support.

Around 300 new students come through the project each year. They study a range of courses provided by the college, from 'Introduction to DIY' to 'Your child and the Internet'.



The majority of the courses are set up after discussions with the users of the CHEC centre. One student says: 'I have been studying self-development and psychology at CHEC. I am so grateful that this facility is here and it has started me off on what eventually will be a whole new career change for me. The staff and tutors are all very helpful and friendly. I look forward every week to my courses'. Another adds: 'Being on the creative writing course in such a positive and friendly atmosphere has given me a new

lease of life and an outlet for all that life throws at me. The CHEC centre has provided for me and others like me, a great alternative to a learning environment. Without this opportunity I don't think I would be where I am or who I am today.'

International partnerships

Collaboration is not limited to the UK and the college has many international partners. For example, British Council funding helped the college to link with Damman College of Technology in Saudi Arabia, and several Saudi engineering firms. Reciprocal trips by staff from both colleges enable the sharing of best practice in quality assurance and assessment practices and provides opportunities to visit engineering employers.

Dave Gill feels that the success of the project owes much to, 'closely involving senior decision makers from both colleges at all times with the project. These managers then have the authority to authorise any actions required to ensure the smooth running of activities'.

Partnerships with schools

Through the excellent relationships with partner primary and secondary schools, over 3,000 pre-16 learners attended the college in 2009/10. These younger students are fully integrated into the campus-based provision and both the individual learners and their schools value the opportunities to follow vocational pathways.



Clear protocols are agreed for reporting attendance and student progress with school staff and parents. One school staff colleague commented on the 'excellent communication and

willingness to learn and adapt in order to do the best for our students'. The college has developed strong collaborative working with the local authority, schools, parents, learners and providers over a number of years.

Collecting feedback to improve provision

At the start of a contract, the employer is asked for a number of impact measurements which are assessed throughout the contract. This allows the college to understand employers, their priorities and is used to guide the future offer to this type of employer. Feedback is collected from learners and employers and is used to improve the support and learning techniques for future learners. Additional feedback is gathered via contract managers who meet with employers on a monthly basis, when they complete a standard feedback form. This information is fed back to the Director of Sales and the Training Manager to ensure that action is taken on any points raised. For campus-based college learners, 'learner voice' surveys are also carried out on a regular basis.

Provider background



Telford College of Arts and Technology is the largest provider of further education in Shropshire. The college operates from a single campus in Wellington in the town of Telford and provides much of its provision in the community and on employers' premises. It has an annual turnover of £34 million.

Provision is mainly vocational education and training, with programmes in 14 subject areas, the largest of which are health, public services and care, engineering and manufacturing technologies, and preparation for life and work. Training provision for employers is substantial, along with programmes to train unemployed people. The college has in excess of 30,000 students, of whom approximately 2,000 are full-time.

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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