

# Promoting enterprise in vocational courses for 16–19-year-old students in colleges

A good practice report

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The promotion of an enterprise culture as a means of stimulating economic growth and improving economic prosperity is a key focus of government and industry. The promotion of enterprise-related skills and entrepreneurial capability among young people entering the workforce has been seen as central to this. The further education sector has a major role in helping to foster an enterprise culture.

Between January and May 2012, inspectors visited 15 colleges to identify the key features of good practice in the promotion of enterprise-related skills and entrepreneurial capability among 16–19-year-old students following vocational courses in colleges. The colleges had been judged to be either good or outstanding for overall effectiveness in their most recent inspection. The survey highlights the transferable practice of these colleges in promoting enterprise education and the positive impact on learner outcomes. Vocational areas explored during the survey visits included: agriculture; animal care; art; graphics; media and fashion; business; childcare; health and social care; construction; furniture making; hair and beauty; hospitality and catering; motor vehicle maintenance; science; sport; travel and tourism.

## Key findings

- The colleges visited had made a strategic decision to focus on the promotion of enterprise. They had recognised that formal qualifications by themselves were not always enough to guarantee success and that employers and higher education institutions were looking for a range of additional skills and attributes.
- The colleges' focus on developing students' enterprise-related skills contributed to students being very well prepared for their work placements and for employment. The students surveyed were able to reflect maturely and with insight on their developing skills; they were confident and had positive attitudes and good communication skills.
- The commitment of the principal and senior leaders was the single most important factor in the successful promotion of enterprise-related skills and

entrepreneurial capability in the colleges visited. This permeated college values, was an important element in strategic plans and was linked to strategic priorities.

- The colleges offered extensive and coherent enterprise-related provision that was an integral part of students' experience. Four colleges were having a radical rethink about how they organised their curriculum, for example by promoting the value of innovative project-based approaches to learning. Other colleges continued to follow a more conventional scheduling approach. The survey identified no single approach that led to the successful promotion of enterprise other than a commitment to well-thought-out, high-quality provision.
- There was a clear focus on the development of enterprise-related skills in almost all the assessed work seen, regardless of the principal subject focus. In many cases, assessed work also focused well on the development of entrepreneurial capability, where students were required to produce business plans and identify market opportunities, but this tended to be confined to particular subject areas rather than occurring more generally across all vocational courses.
- The opportunity to undertake additional industry-relevant skills-based qualifications, as well as more generic employability and enterprise qualifications, provided a value-added element to students' experience. This enabled them to enhance their employment prospects and often contributed to the skills they might need to support small business or self-employment aspirations.
- The colleges visited provided: purposeful work placements that were well managed and well structured, with clear learning objectives; workplace supervision and mentoring; opportunities to practise skills in real work settings and develop enterprise-related skills under supervision; assessment by employers or placement supervisors; and the provision of constructive feedback. Assessment and outcomes were linked closely to students' college programmes. This informed and gave direction to their continuing work on developing enterprise-related skills on their return to college.
- Highly skilled staff with up-to-date knowledge and experience in their sectors made a major contribution to the successful provision of enterprise in their particular subject areas. In the colleges visited, the staff observed had high credibility with students, employers and other agencies in their sectors.
- Teaching and learning consistently promoted enterprise-related skills regardless of the subject matter. Thus, basing learning in real business contexts; encouraging collaborative working; requiring students to take responsibility and use their initiative to solve problems; and making presentations, were regular aspects of teaching and learning in all the colleges surveyed.
- Very strong links with local employers ensured that students were made fully aware of the enterprise-related skills and entrepreneurial capability required in particular vocational sectors. Many of the most valuable links were with local small or medium businesses. There was little evidence of regional or national business or employer representative organisations having an impact on the work of the colleges visited in this respect.

- Industry-standard facilities and environments provided students with experiences that reflected real employment situations. The use of college-based companies and enterprise initiatives to develop business ideas and students' enterprise-related skills and entrepreneurial capability contributed to this.
- Additional activities contributed to the development of students' enterprise-related skills and entrepreneurial capability by providing them with opportunities to experience their subject in a variety of real-world business contexts. These included, for example, taking part in industry-relevant competitions; attending industry-relevant events, shows, demonstrations and conferences; listening to guest speakers and undergoing mock interviews.
- Despite these very positive features of provision, colleges did not routinely audit or quality assure their provision for enterprise-related skills and entrepreneurial capability. As a result they were unable to ensure the highest quality of delivery across all curriculum areas; they did not routinely share good practice across curriculum areas or encourage cross-curricular developments, and were unable to guarantee a minimum entitlement for all students. The role of governors in promoting sustainable and systematic business links and in holding their colleges to account for enterprise-related targets and performance indicators was unclear.
- Colleges were not able to show that those students who had access to provision with an emphasis on enterprise-related skills did better, or were more likely to go into employment or self-employment, than those students on similar vocational programmes who did not. This was because colleges were not evaluating the impact of their provision in this area by explicitly identifying, recording or assessing achievement in relation to enterprise-related skills. At a macro-level, the lack of detailed destination data relating to employment and self-employment meant that colleges were unable to identify trends that might inform their curriculum planning and improvement.
- The extent to which these colleges provided advice and guidance on self-employment and business start-up opportunities depended on the subject sector being considered and the expertise and background of staff. While all made good provision to develop students' understanding of current market trends and opportunities in their specific sectors, the explicit provision to develop students' understanding of the business start-up process, their financial acumen and ability to assess the viability of different business models was more variable. In general, where this was not evident it was because colleges did not judge it to be relevant for students at this stage in their careers, for example because they were considering further or higher education and training rather than self-employment.
- The focus of this good practice survey was to consider the experience of 16–19-year-old students on vocational courses, but it did emerge that for students taking non-vocational courses in preparation for higher education there were far fewer opportunities and relatively little provision to develop enterprise-related skills. Arguably they are as likely to need such skills in their future lives as students on the vocational courses explored during the visits.

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