



**The Lancashire Colleges &
Jobcentre Plus**
“A Partnership that Works”

A Best Practice Guide

Introduction

'The Lancashire Colleges' - twelve Further Education Colleges across Lancashire - and the county's Jobcentres are delivering a highly successful partnership model:

- Lancashire, of 37 Jobcentre Plus Districts in the country, currently has the highest number of starts on Skills Conditionality provision. It also has the second highest referral rate nationally.
- Lancashire has the highest number of skills conditionality referrals and starts on Basic Skills provision in the country.
- Lancashire also has the highest number of starts nationally for occupational training under Skills Conditionality. Over 50 sector based work academies have been set up across the county.
- Cumbria and Lancashire Jobcentre Plus District are currently in the top ten best performing Districts nationally for moving claimants off benefit; 55% at 13 weeks, 75% at 6 months, 86% at 39 weeks and 90% at 12 months.

(All performance figures above are based on Year to Date Management Information as at July 2012.)

The Lancashire Colleges and Cumbria and Lancashire Jobcentre Plus have created a partnership that works; a partnership that is helping to transform lives.

This best practice guide provides college and Jobcentre Plus managers and staff with advice and guidance to provide better support and outcomes for customers. It contains practical insights on how to seize opportunities arising from the closer alignment of Further Education and Jobcentre Plus.

The guide describes the five factors that should be present to assist claimants become confident, motivated learners:

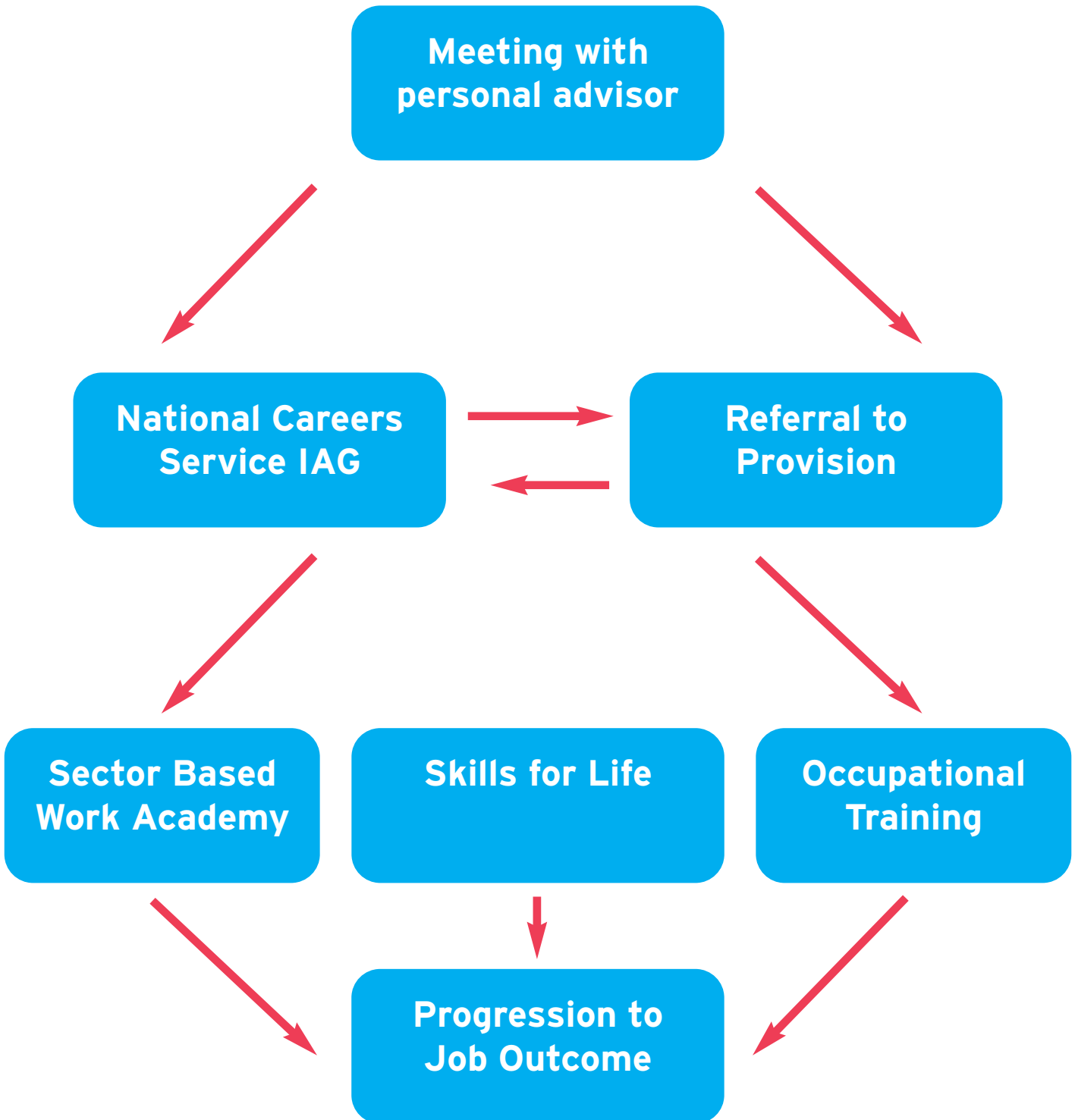
- Strong Relationships
- Flexibility and responsiveness
- Community based provision
- Two way conversation
- Employer Engagement

These five factors are inextricably linked, each reinforcing the other and combining to underpin the partnerships between college and Jobcentre Plus staff.

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Job Centre Plus Claimant Journey

The diagram below shows the claimant journey from meeting a personal adviser in the Jobcentre via joining a sector based work academy or undertaking other training to obtaining a job.



1. Strong relationships

It is important that Jobcentre Plus and colleges have regular communication so both parties are informed and responsive to change. Jobcentre Plus produces a monthly bulletin for external partners to foster regular communication. This is backed up by regular review meetings enabling both parties to see the big picture locally and to keep on top of changing processes and funding constraints.

“We have an excellent relationship with Blackburn College. They are very responsive to our requests for new courses. Nothing is too much trouble for them; they are so responsive” - Christine Gregson, Employer & Partnerships Team, Blackburn Jobcentre



“Twelve months ago, there was no direct strategic relationship between the Lancashire Colleges and Jobcentre Plus. Many colleges were involved in good local partnership work but levels of engagement differed. Now, there are both strategic and - this is the absolute key - local frontline relationships.” Christine's feedback about Blackburn College is representative of all The Lancashire Colleges.

A determined and consistent aim has been to ensure that relationships are effective at every level.

The Lancashire Colleges have been an enabler for the joint strategy, raising the skills levels of benefit claimants, supporting Lancashire's economic growth; delivering the skills required by the labour market; maximising available funding and avoiding duplication.

Jobcentre Plus Partnership Managers have sought and achieved the “buy in” to that strategy. College Principals' commitment and willingness to commit Adult Skills Budget resources to fund units and awards has been central to local success. This has helped Lancashire become one of the top performing Districts in the UK for getting people back to work through skills training.

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2. Flexible and responsive

Central to the success of the partnership is an understanding of each other's systems and processes, so provision is planned that meets the needs of job seekers in their local economy.

Both Job Centre Plus advisors and college staff treat job seekers with dignity, respect and as individuals, ensuring that they receive a personalised programme that increases their confidence, motivation and employability.

Case Studies

"I've been looking for work for over 12 months now, with no luck. It has given me motivation and has opened up a route to a job opportunity which is amazing!" Lancaster & Morecambe College Learner

The following case study from the joint working between Blackburn College and Blackburn Jobcentre is an exemplar typical of all Lancashire Colleges.

Jobcentre Advisers requested motivational, employability skills training for claimants in the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) work related activity group. Advisers knew there was a "gap in the market" for people in this group, who had mild to moderate mental health conditions and had been out of work for a long time.

The College responded by designing a course, and as this was in response to customer need, local ownership was clearly secured. The College interviewed prospective customers in the Jobcentre and course members were then met there and taken to the College personally by the course tutors. Many of the ESA claimants had seldom left the house and this small step was so important to get right. From this firm foundation, the group gelled and of the nine learners that attended, eight went on to further courses.

Building on that success, a second group was formed shortly afterwards and of those nine people:

- All nine started
- Five progressed to a Care course
- Two progressed to an IT course
- One progressed to a Digital Technology course

Feedback was overwhelmingly positive:

"I am so glad I completed the course, even though some days I had to force myself to come out of the house. I now have more self-confidence and patience with other people". Blackburn College Learner

The following case study comes from the joint working between Nelson & Colne College and their local Jobcentres

A new company approached Nelson & Colne College to recruit and train staff for a call handling centre in Pendle. Working with Jobcentre Plus and the employer, the College formed a sector based work academy and short-listed prospective employees, delivering intensive work skills prior to their interview with the employer. This resulted in twelve successful job applications, all of whom enrolled as level 2 apprentices.

Central to the success of the partnership is an understanding of each other's systems and processes, so provision is planned that meets the needs of job seekers in their local economy.

3. Community based provision

Since their inception, colleges have always had a strong relationship with their local communities. This means a whole life mix of diverse learners can be brought together through provision that meets their needs; economic, personal or social.

All Lancashire Colleges are either co-located within Jobcentres, enabling and strengthening the relationships described, or are utilising new and existing town centre premises to provide convenient and welcoming learning environments.

Courses are delivered in locations that maximise retention rates whenever feasible. For example, Accrington & Rossendale College deliver training from Ribble Valley Homes sites thus ensuring transport and travelling time was not an issue. Not surprisingly, no one dropped out of the course.

Colleges also use their Real Work Environments to offer authentic experience for job seekers giving them real skills for real jobs. For example the successful Pathways Programme at Lancaster & Morecambe College utilises the professional kitchens, restaurant and construction workshops to give learners practical skills for the workplace.

“The course fulfilled my wish to work with wood and I was encouraged to successfully apply for a full time carpentry and joinery course” Lancaster & Morecambe College Learner

“This programme and pathway to care has without doubt helped me to gain employment with two different companies.” Lancaster & Morecambe College Learner

4. Two way conversation

We should never underestimate the power of enabling frontline staff to talk to each other in a supportive and creative environment.

Preston Jobcentre has a regular forum with Preston College, with a mix of management and advisory staff. This allows for open and frank discussion on issues and solutions leading to the mapping and tailoring of future provision.

“Our joint forums are hugely important. Staff at all levels have an opportunity to canvass opinions, so that everyone’s views can be gathered. It really has led to an increase in engagement by both sets of staff” - Huw Roberts, Preston Jobcentre.

When Waitrose announced they were opening a new store in Preston staff at the local college and Jobcentre joined forces to set up a sector based work academy which placed 14 people in work and helped Waitrose to successfully open a new store.



5. Employer engagement

Sector-based work academies (SBWAs) were launched on 1 August 2011. Joint working has resulted in pre-employment training opportunities, leading to sustainable jobs across Lancashire. Over 50 employer-led SBWAs have now been set up. Jobcentres and colleges have maximised their existing relationships with employers, leading to outcomes valued by employers.

Lancaster & Morecambe College have delivered six SBWAs for companies including Travelodge, Sainsbury's, local restaurants, a call centre and the NHS resulting in 35 job outcomes.

Chris, a learner who took part in the Sainsbury's pathway, has now held down his job for 6 months. He said, *"I would never have considered college, but look at me now, it really has changed my life"*

The Way Forward - The Lancashire Colleges and Jobcentre Plus; enabling the "second chance society" and transforming lives

Flexible local relationships have delivered sustainable job outcomes and, crucially, have supported some of the most vulnerable people; treating them with dignity and respect and as individuals.

The Government published the Social Justice - Transforming Lives - Strategy - launched by The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in March 2012. The Strategy describes a vision for a "second chance society": anybody who needs a second chance in society should be able to access the support and tools they need to transform their lives.

"Very often it is those working at the local community level that are best placed to identify and drive forward the solutions that are needed. We need to ensure services are user-focused around the needs of individuals rather than the boundaries of different agencies."

[Source: Social Justice; transforming lives, www.dwp.gov.uk/social-justice]

Transforming lives is a central aspiration of both The Lancashire Colleges and Jobcentre Plus. The inspirational partnerships that have been nurtured, at every level, will continue and grow. In this way local communities will have myriad sustainable opportunities to make Lancashire a better place in which to work and live.

"The programme was brilliant. The teaching presentation was excellent, the course was very informative and I have acquired new skills from the course." Lancaster & Morecambe College Learner.

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