

Kent and Medway Lifelong Learning Network Newsletter - February 2008

The Lifelong Learning Network (LLN) is a partnership of Canterbury Christ Church University, Canterbury College, Hadlow College, Mid-Kent College, North West Kent College, Open University in the South East, South Kent College, University College for the Creative Arts (at Canterbury, Epsom, Farnham, Maidstone and Rochester) University of Greenwich, University of Kent and West Kent College.

Welcome to the first 2008 edition of the LLN Newsletter. It is designed to provide a flavour of the wide range of activities that are underway within the LLN in Kent and Medway. The new year for the LLN sees fourteen new sector projects being launched, a lot of activity in each partner institution focussed on progression for vocational learners, all five sector coordinators in place, the launch of the LLN website at www.gohigher.org.uk and an exciting programme of conferences and staff development activities. My thanks to Alison Gray and Denise Cormack, LLN Coordinators for Thanet College and Mid Kent college for co-editing this newsletter and to all the contributors. (Hugh Joslin, LLN Director).

Kent and Medway LLN Website Goes Live!

The LLN website is now live courtesy of KAFEC, who has kindly agreed that the Gohigher website can be the virtual home of the LLN. The website features LLN news and updates, zones for practitioners, learners and employers and an interactive discussion area for online open communication. The progression mapping work covered by some of the LLN funded projects is being used to build a short course database which will be accessible from the website.

Conferences and Events

In November the LLN organised a successful event which provided an update on the progress of the new Diplomas. Speakers from Edexcel, Skills for Health and Medway Council updated attendees on how they have been supporting and promoting the Diplomas and revealed some of the challenges and opportunities associated with the implementation of the new awards.

The **Annual Kent and Medway LLN Conference** will be held on **25th April 2008** at the University of Greenwich, Chatham Maritime. Come along and find out more about the current and future work of the Kent and Medway LLN.

The LLN will be holding a **Learner Voice Conference** on **4th June 2008** at the Ashford International Hotel. The conference will focus on gaining a better understanding of learner needs and how we can respond and carve the way forward to ensure those needs are met. All LLN events are free and can be booked by contacting Janey Robertson at j.a.robertson@gre.ac.uk

Sector Co-ordinator Update

In the autumn term, the Sector Coordinators took up their posts in their respective HEI. Their appointments were timely as the bidding process for sector funds had just begun. Since then the Sector Coordinators have been getting to know their sectors via their sector development groups and through networking. They have also been involved in meeting and forming new relationships with other organisations such as the Sector Skills Groups, the Gateway Knowledge Alliance, Foundation Degree Forward and employers.

The sector coordinators will continue to carry out work to keep a dialogue going between employers, partner institutions and LLN stakeholders.



Dates for your Diary

- > 25 April 08
LLN Annual Conference
- > 14 May 08
14-19 Diploma Event
- > 4 June 08
Learner Voice Conference

Inside this issue:

Creative Business Project	2
Summer University	2
Spreading the Message	2
Study Skills for HE	2
Building Opportunities	3
Can I Teach?	3
LLN Coordinator Awareness Training	3
Apprentices Project	3
Big Event Day	4
Sector Update	4
Progression	4



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They will work to deliver the targets set out in their respective development plans as well as support any work to help the progression of vocational learners into and through higher education. Sector Development Coordinators are:

- **Sharon Perera** - Health, Social Care and Education. sharon.perera@canterbury.ac.uk
- **Louise Tucker** - Business, Administration and Finance and Culture, Leisure, Tourism and Hospitality. Lmtucker@ucreative.ac.uk, L.m.c.tucker@kent.ac.uk
- **Geoff Anderson** - Engineering, Manufacturing and the Built Environment. g.e.anderson@greenwich.ac.uk
- **Kathy Mitchell** - Land Based and Sustainable Futures. kathy.mitchell@hadlow.ac.uk

Creative Business Project gets the green light

Approved in the Autumn 2007 bidding round, the Creative Business Project is one of the largest projects funded by the LLN. The project seeks to identify opportunities to re-package HE modules in order to explore methods of reaching a wider audience for higher education. The project will be offering courses to teach business skills to creatives on the one hand, and exploring options to inject creativity into the world of business on the other. The Creative Business project, a collaboration between LLN partner institutions, is being led by the University College for the Creative Arts (UCreative), the University of Kent and Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU). Each institution will be challenged to identify appropriate modules of between 5 and 15 credits to portfolios of courses that will appeal to a non-traditional student cohort.

"We're hoping to offer existing modules in a variety of new ways, including options for online learning, off-campus venues and distance learning. It's about how we communicate the options that are open to potential learners and learn from them how we can better meet their needs." commented Jude Sach, Coordinator for the University of Kent. Liz Millar, Coordinator for UCreative, explained that the aim of the project is to provide a positive practical experience for new students which will encourage them into and through HE courses. "We're keen to explore the ways in which we can support progression onto programmes at partner institutions and are interested in hearing from programmes that would like to establish progression agreements in this area."

"The project will concentrate on provision in Medway and Folkestone – two areas that have identified the Creative and Cultural industries as key to their regeneration plans, although learners from other areas of Kent are, of course, welcomed. J.sach@kent.ac.uk

Learners experience a Summer University

In July and September 2007 Hadlow College ran a Summer University in collaboration with the LLN and Greenwich University.

The programme was organised by Tonia Hillidge, LLN Coordinator at Hadlow. Careful consideration was given to what programmes would best meet the needs of learners and when would be the best time to offer it. 'Getting started on your dissertation' ran twice in July. This supported 21 learners in preparing for their dissertation. Feedback from these learners suggested that they felt more confident about their study. 'Introduction to research and study skills' ran in September. This was attended by 10 learners who were about to undertake an HE programme. Feedback from these learners indicated that they felt more prepared to study at HE level and that they had greater awareness of what was expected of them on their programme.

Spreading the message about the LLN

At the end of 2007, Canterbury Christ Church University organised two lunch events for CCCU colleagues to learn more about the work of the LLN within CCCU. At the end of 2007, Canterbury Christ Church University organised two lunch events for CCCU colleagues to learn more about the work of the LLN within CCCU. The events were held at both the Canterbury and Medway campuses. The main site in Canterbury and at the Medway Campus. Sue Piotrowski, the Pro-Vice Chancellor at CCCU, introduced the Canterbury forum. LLN colleagues Wendy Ellis and Sharon Perera (pictured below) spoke to attendees about how and why Lifelong Learning networks had been established.

Attendees also learnt more from Wendy and Sharon about the LLN's projects and development activities including details on how they could become involved. Following on from the presentations, Viki Faulkner, LLN Strand Manager, led a discussion forum focused on engaging with the Diploma, achievement of additional student numbers, the value of threshold guidance and Progression Agreements.



Study Skills for Higher Education courses

It seems that study skills are a big issue when it comes to progression to higher education for vocational students. Anecdotal evidence suggests that a significant number of vocational students who progress to HE have difficulties in this area. Denise Cormack, LLN Coordinator at Mid Kent College, carried out a literature review to establish what research had been done on this issue,



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specifically with vocational students and found there was very little information available.

Competence in study skills affects not only success and retention in HE, but also progression from level 3 vocational courses such as National Diplomas. Denise asked a number of lecturers teaching National Diploma courses at Kent and Medway FECs and was told that due to time constraints, they tended to 'teach to get through the curriculum' rather than develop HE ready study skills; many teachers in FE can probably relate to this.

While some lecturers and personal tutors are doing excellent work raising awareness and preparing students for HE, perhaps using the OCN study skills units, it seems that this is not the norm. If learners are not being given the guidance and opportunity to develop these skills, they are much less likely to aspire to HE and they are less likely to be aware of their own potential or have the confidence to apply. If learners do not have family members or friends from their locality who have HE qualifications, they may think that HE 'is not for people like them'.

So, what exactly are the issues? And what are the solutions? Is a programme of study skills for level 3 vocational students the answer? If so, how should it be delivered? In an attempt to get answers to these and other questions Denise invited lecturers from HE and other interested parties to take part in a session which aimed to map out the issues and seek some potential solutions. The session revealed that learners need to develop a wide spectrum of study skills ranging from research and the use of academic language to structuring essays and the ability to study independently. The majority of Universities offer study skills support, but it was agreed that this should be as a back up, not a starting point. Greenwich University runs a summer school which includes a number of study skills (which could be offered flexibly at any time of the year) and the OCN has a number of study skills modules. It was agreed that funding can be problematic. The OCN course at level 3 is LSC fundable under discretionary provision, but this has to fit in with the FEC's funding allocation; FECs are, therefore, often not in a position to offer such courses. The Greenwich programme is HEFCE funded, but can that be offered to a student currently studying at level 3? These are questions that Denise is currently looking into, along with proposals to spend time getting the learner's point of view. For further information or to contribute to the debate please email denise.cormack@midkent.ac.uk

Building Opportunities

With the building boom in the South East set to continue, North West Kent and South Kent Colleges are leading on a project which is contributing towards upskilling workers and learners within the construction industry.

The project is focusing on the development of higher progression pathways, accrediting work-based learning for present employees, delivering higher level skills needed in certain areas and allowing opportunities for membership of professional bodies.

Can I Teach?

This CCCU led project has been supporting learners undertaking qualifications in the Lifelong Learning Sector - namely learners on the PTLLS programme, some of whom are new to learning and to teaching. The project provides one-to-one support with a tutor and can involve assisting the learner with study skills, lesson planning or presentation skills. The project has already engaged learners in Carshalton College, Mid-Kent College and South Kent College.

LLN Coordinators receive awareness training in Information, Advice and Guidance

Six input sessions were recently delivered to LLN Coordinators by Alison Fielding from CCCU, including a two day residential at CCCU's Salomons campus. The participating Coordinators enjoyed the learning that took place. Assignments are currently being undertaken by the Coordinators, which include reflecting on their own practice in the form of a work-based learning guide.

Update on Apprentices project

University Vocational Awards Council (UVAC) research into good practice and HE progression from Advanced Modern Apprenticeship (AMA) found that those apprenticeship programmes providing a significant level of progression included 2 essential elements; staff development which improved the delivery of HE transition strategies - eg, study skills units, and HE induction sessions during the apprenticeship.

Local research found that the progression rate to HE for AMA in Kent is less than 2%. Other studies suggest that this low progression rate is due in part to the lack of appropriate study skills and lack of HE progression routes and opportunities.

Mid-Kent College, in Partnership with IPS International, Aimhigher, the University of Kent, the University of Greenwich and Connexions are working on an LLN funded project to open up progression possibilities for Construction and Engineering Apprentices in the Medway area.

The first stage will be to investigate the AMA curricula in this sector and to identify HE programmes with which these curricula articulate. The next stage will be to develop bridging programmes and progression agreements to ensure that the apprentices have clear progression routes.



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Along with progression routes information, advice and guidance on progression possibilities, funding issues, HE application processes and bridging courses will be available. Providing opportunities for AMA to HE progression will facilitate an increase in skills levels across the sector in Kent and Medway.

Big Event Day

Canterbury College, the Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) for Travel and Tourism is planning an inter-college "Big Event Day" on March 25th to promote and encourage Level 3 vocational learners on Travel and Tourism course to progress onto Level 4 courses. The event will cover the following activities:

- Key speakers from Travel and Tourism industries will talk about career pathways and the breadth of job opportunities after gaining a level 4 Travel and Tourism qualification
- Connexions Advisers will be on hand to offer impartial advice and guidance
- Financial advice will be available to help learners to assist them in making decisions about how to finance their learning
- Travel and Tourism Student Ambassadors will be on hand to tell learners about their stories and experiences

For further information about the event please contact Mel Francis-Jones, LLN Co-ordinator at Canterbury College on 01227 811111 ext 2045 or at m.francis-jones@cant-col.ac.uk



Part of Canterbury College's redeveloped campus

Sector update for Engineering, Manufacturing and the Built Environment

The Sector Group for Engineering, Manufacturing and the Built Environment is now firmly established within the LLN. A strategically influential group, in terms of delivering key objectives for the LLN, has been built with strong support from local employers.

The sector's focus on building vocational progression pathways to enable local work-based learners to progress into and through HE was central to the agenda at the recent Sector Group Meeting (picture below) held at the Medway Universities campus.



John Harris, the Higher Education Manager for SEMTA (the Sector Skills Council for Science, Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies) provided employers, private training providers, local FE and HE institutions and the Thames Gateway Knowledge Alliance with a model of progression for advanced apprentices moving from level 3 into Level 4 and beyond. John's illustrated presentation stimulated much discussion among the group, not least the issue of funding learners' progression where work-based NVQs are being delivered at levels 4/5.

The Sector Group has a clear focus on both the individual learner and the future needs of local employers. The goal of the Kent and Medway LLN is to provide the vehicle through which real and sustainable change can be made to benefit individuals, employers and the local economy.

For further information contact the sector co-ordinator Geoff Anderson g.e.anderson@greenwich.ac.uk.

Progression, Progression, Progression!

Progression is at the heart of the LLN's deliverables and a lot of work is currently underway to accomplish this. 2007 saw the groundwork being laid to promote the concept of enhancing progression for vocational learners. Institutional Progression Accords have been developed and finalised and it is expected that all Institutions will sign up to the Accord during February 2008. These accords commit institutions to promoting progression for vocational learners and to developing progression agreements where they can be seen to enhance progression. To date, eight Progression Agreements have been completed and many more are either reaching completion or are being developed. The Agreements demonstrate a diverse range of scope; some are programme to programme within an individual institution, others cross all providers within a single qualification and others are sector wide.

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