

Professional Development Activity undertaken, June 2006

As Careers and Employability teacher in De La Salle High School, Downpatrick, and with consultation with members of my department, it was decided to investigate our local employment sector to determine what they require from pupils leaving at age sixteen and seventeen. In line with the new employability requirements of the revised curriculum and as a result of a large number of our school leavers taking up employment in construction, we decided to focus on the construction industry. A questionnaire was drawn up and interviews arranged with a number of local construction people, including Plumbers, Joiners and Bricklayers. I also arranged to visit the CITB to investigate how it can contribute to Careers and Employability education in a secondary school. It was also decided to expand the investigation and interview other major employers in the area, namely ASDA, who have just recently moved to Downpatrick and Costcutters, a local supermarket to ascertain the skills and qualities required from our pupils on leaving our school after five years of secondary education. A number of case studies will be designed relating to these areas and a number of guest speakers identified that can be utilised in future planning. On consultation, with my principal, it was also decided to investigate the possibility of providing an appropriate course with recognised qualifications which our school or local institute could offer that is suitable for our pupils and meets the needs of the construction industry. Meetings were therefore arranged with our local East Down Institute, O'Boyle Training Centre and the local Job Market.

The outcomes in terms of improved practice by the teacher

The outcomes proved interesting and most beneficial. Having interviewed a number of employers, I have identified a number of interesting facts and also improvements that can be offered to our leavers. From the responses, it was satisfying to know that local employers are always willing to take our school leavers, either by directly employing them or in conjunction with the local East Down Institute or O'Boyles. For construction, either a 3 or 4 year course is required and all those interviewed were ensuring that all their employees completed the appropriate course and gained the appropriate qualifications. When asked if school leavers are prepared for employment, those interviewed agreed they have some of the basic skills but more emphasis is needed on practical work. Skills needed in the construction industry are the ability to work safely, to use the proper safety gear, to show initiative, to be willing to learn and to show a positive attitude. Team work is essential

and it is suggested that we concentrate on developing the skills of communication, co-operating and progressing in a manner that is desirable to all involved. It is envisaged that, in line with the new curriculum, such skills and abilities will be developed through the enhanced focus on group and team work. A number of firms also suggested that more detailed effort is needed when completing application forms. The pupils need to sell themselves to the employer. After all there are a large number of applicants (especially with the new inflow of non-nationals) and only those who stand out will receive an interview. Interview techniques also need practice as all of those asked were adamant that 16/17 year olds do not sell themselves enough at interviews, 'the more interviews they (16/17 year olds) experience the more confident and competent they become'. An interview evening with pupils being interviewed on an individual basis is a suggestion. Willing to learn, a positive attitude, works safely and the work ethic were the most popular skills/qualities identified by employers. A lack of preparation for jobs and a poor attitude were pinpointed and as a careers department it is important that we focus on these in the coming year. It is also suggested that more work placements be considered for pupils to familiarise them with the work place and to invite a number of guest speakers from the industry (a number have forwarded their name) in to speak about their experiences and expectations. CITB are also keen to become regular contributors to our school environment and have suggested a works visit/sampling day to their headquarters in Nuttscorner, the use of their on-line facilities and a construction day focusing on specific trades in the school. The local training centres and East Down Institute are currently considering the possibility of offering new courses that are more suitable to the construction sector with an emphasis on safety and teamwork.

The Outcomes or benefits of the activity in terms of improvements in pupil learning activities.

A number of ideas have arisen that can be implemented in the coming year. Emphasis, in careers and indeed all subjects, will be placed on teamwork and the importance of co-operation and showing initiative. Employers made it clear they are looking for employees who are willing to work and learn and show a positive attitude and work ethic. A number of case studies involving the recruitment procedures of companies, ASDA, CITB and local building firms will be utilised in career classes again focusing on the ability to teamwork, proper completion of application forms, promoting oneself at the interview and the ability to operate in a less controlled environment than that experienced in school.

Emphasis will also be placed on the successful completion of probation period as quite a number of employees fail to properly satisfy their employers' expectations and hence their employment is terminated. A number of guest speakers will be involved with the school in the coming year, local trades men, representatives from CITB, Down District Council and Training Centres. It is hoped these talks will help focus pupils on the expectations of employers, the importance of knowing the proper conduct in the work place and also help broaden the options and paths available to them on leaving at age 16/17. Works visits to CITB and a number of local firms/organisations should also prove beneficial to the learning experiences of the pupils. Career week will help focus such emphasis and the possibility of an extended work experience for all year 12 will be looked at, however, the pressure of exams in year 12 is noted and a possible work experience for year 11 at the end of the summer term may be an option.

How the success of the professional development has been/ will be evaluated.

I plan to evaluate this activity on the basis of pupil responses to case studies, their completion of application forms, their interview techniques and the feedback from employers who interview them. The numbers taking up construction for work experience and at year end will also indicate the effectiveness of the programme. I plan to investigate pupil and employer feedback from work experience, (questionnaire). I plan to survey the local construction industry in September 07 to indicate the numbers being employed and how their attitude and work ethic has changed. I will contact those interviewed in this activity to ascertain their views and again for any suggestions which may arise. I will also receive feedback from visiting speakers, local training institutes and the East Down Institute to determine the numbers who apply for/complete appropriate courses. I feel contact with pupils 2 - 3 years into the course will also be beneficial and provide important feedback for all interested with the possibility of having a past pupil coming back to help promote the industry.

How the experiences, skills and knowledge gained have been/will be shared with other teachers

I plan to share all knowledge and experiences with fellow teachers through department meetings and provision of materials outlined above. I will also meet with other departments such as Technology, Science, Mathematics and emphasise the important factors and suggestions given.

I am also doing a presentation on my findings and the link with employability and the world of work at a staff meeting in August of 06. The findings from this activity will also be available to any local schools who wish to avail of them.

Reflection by the teacher on the value and effectiveness of the activity.

As a recently appointed Careers HOD, I have gained a lot of valuable knowledge and insight from this activity. I have met a number of valuable contacts, got their views and opinions which I will be able to pass on to the pupils with competence. I have a much clearer knowledge of how the system works and the interviews with local training agencies the local Institute of Further and Higher Education and the job centre have all helped in gaining valuable knowledge and expertise. The case studies and the visiting speakers should prove beneficial and the importance of works visits and indeed work experience to sample the feel of the sites/work environments is of immense importance. There is still work to complete regarding suitable courses our school or local institutes could offer but it is important to point out the central role of teamwork and co-operation, particularly on building sites. I feel that our pupils will benefit with the new key stage 3 Curriculum focusing on Employability. It is good that they are learning about all these attributes from an early age. I hope to utilise all these resources in the coming year in career and employability classes and indeed to give employability and careers a more prominent stature in our school.

Future plans/suggestions for further development.

In line with the new key stage 3 curriculum, I would like to see emphasis being placed on teamwork and co-operation throughout the school. I feel the more teamwork pupils are involved in the better they will learn to cope with the features of the everyday working life. It will also help develop their investigative skills, promote their initiative in solving problems and help them cope in group situations. I would also like to plan a suitable course that would benefit pupils when leaving for the work environment, possibly a safety course for building sites, an interview and presentation course to help develop confidence and competence, longer work experience in year 11 or extending the year 12 period, basic food and hygiene to help those in the industry but also for general knowledge and know how. An on-line course to aid pupils in completing some of their essential qualifications needed for works sites is another possibility.

Presented by

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