

Citizens' Curriculum Case Study: York College

About the Citizens' Curriculum

The Citizens' Curriculum is an innovative and flexible model for language, literacy and numeracy provision which places the needs of learners and communities at its core. Its aim is to develop new ways of offering learning which engages and motivates adults in all kinds of contexts to improve their English, maths and other 'life skills', resulting in better progression, outcomes and aspirations - into and at work, in learning and in personal, family and community life. The underpinning principles of the Citizens' Curriculum are:

- A holistic approach to provision for adult learners interpreted through the local context
- Learner involvement in determining the curriculum to meet their needs and interests
- An interlinked combination of literacy, numeracy, ESOL, financial, health, digital and civic capabilities

Background

York College aimed to refresh its adult literacy and numeracy curriculum offer to adult learners, and used its Citizens' Curriculum pilot to explore ways in which the provision could be made more relevant and engaging. Based on learner focus group feedback, the college revised current schemes of work to embed a wider range of capabilities alongside literacy and numeracy skills. The revised programme was then piloted with learners, and the results informed curriculum planning for future courses.

Citizens' Curriculum Principle	Locally-led learning, responding to the needs of the local community, economy or specific cohorts of learners	Learner involvement in determining the curriculum	An interlinked combination of capabilities
How it worked	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Close partnerships with local organisations, including JCP, employers and the Local Enterprise Partnership allows York College to tailor their learning offer to the needs of the local community and economy – basic skills are a priority.● Aimed to make the class more relevant, engaging and motivating, and help learners to be better able to participate in college life.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Learners completed initial and diagnostic assessments and had one-to-one interviews to determine their learning needs.● Individual Learning Plans and enhanced feedback gathered through surveys, focus groups and termly reviews contributed to ongoing development of the course.● Exit questionnaires introduced to help provide a more structured approach to feedback from learners leaving provision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Language and literacy – learners worked towards a Functional Skills English qualification and some learners with ESOL needs were also improving their language skills.● Numeracy – learners interpreted and interrogated statistics to explore topics for project-based activities.● Digital – learners used mobile devices and computers to conduct research and access resources on the Virtual Learning Environment.● Health – learners chose health topics to explore in class, such as the bias against carbonated soft-drinks.

Impact

The tutor leading the pilot adopted a more participatory approach to designing their Citizens' Curriculum programme and allowed learners to decide on the topics to be addressed each week. The tutor ensured that this linked in to the overarching context of preparing learners for English Functional Skills qualifications, as the pilot took place in accredited provision.

'My role really was to look at what they wanted to discuss and what they wanted to learn and cover and fit that into the core curriculum and where do we fit that into the grand scheme of preparing people for their reading exam.' (Tutor)

This approach encouraged learners to take responsibility for their learning and gave them the opportunity to self-regulate and monitor their performance. Incorporating current news articles and events enabled learners to see how English skills could benefit their everyday lives. As a result, the pilot has encouraged them 'to think more' about what they read and what it means. Subsequently, learners have been able to develop their verbal and written reasoning skills, which in turn have enabled them to be more active in different areas of their lives.

'I take part in the conversations at work and stuff. I think people are amazed when I come up with an answer, because before I didn't say anything because I didn't think I knew anything about it. But now I do all that, I surprise people at work when I take part in conversations they think I wouldn't understand.' (Learner)

Critical Success Factors – Tips for Implementing the Citizens' Curriculum

- Citizens' Curriculum capabilities and learner-led approaches can be integrated into formal, accredited learning and help bring the qualifications learners are working towards to life.
- Reviewing and enhancing mechanisms for gathering learner feedback and assessing learning needs – for example, to include initial focus group discussions – can support the development of more relevant and engaging content and contexts for skills development.