

## Employer engagement

### 1.

#### Issues

The normal reaction from companies when they are faced with an increase is to question the validity of the relationship and ask is it worth continuing, or can we refuse to pay the extra. Their attitude may be in some instances let the College absorb the increase and take a lower cut.

#### Solution

The way that the College communicates to existing customers is absolutely crucial. The College has forged strong relationships with employers locally and therefore is in a strong position to communicate the benefits of College engagement and a partnership approach to them.

The critical success factors are as follows:-

- Communicate and sell the benefits – **flexibility** – making qualifications for adults more flexible by dividing more learning programmes into units (more manageable), **involvement** – employers have long been concerned that they are not getting recruits with the skills they want so their involvement in the process is vital. **Support** – both financial and assistance from the College, such as skills enhancement and the development of e-learning with more online material and assessment.
- Help employers to develop their skills levels and ensure that any problems are dealt with swiftly and professionally
- Tie the employers in to long term training/continuous development (Customer relationship management)
- Determine their needs, analyse where their skill shortages are – creates opportunities for additional business
- Form strong relationships, based on mutual respect and adopt a partnership approach
- Know who the key decision makers are and develop trust
- Value for money is key
- College management and staff have to raise the bar in terms of customer care, both in terms of preparing young people for employment and the way that we interface with employers.

## 2.

Existing employers would continue to be nurtured as we have seen in the first part of this presentation.

However, what about engaging with new small, medium and large employers.

It is important to sell the benefits of workforce development to new employers in the conurbation and this would be carried out as follows:-

- Look at existing College databases to determine which employers we have dealt with in the past and which ones we currently deal with.
- Mount an emarketing campaign sending emails to the key decision makers in each company, whether small, medium or large. The email would be extremely professional, selling the benefits of our intervention to the client company and would be tailored to the needs of each employer group.
- From my own experience, Managers always read their emails and if interested will either respond immediately or will save it and respond within a few weeks
- Telephone follow up calls will be made to those employers who have not responded and appointments made
- Employer visits – it is advisable to invite employers to the College so they can see the facilities, meet key staff and potential apprentices. Equally, some employers would prefer a visit from a College manager. Vital that at these meetings a positive outcome is secured by using persuasive skills to sell the benefits of employer engagement with the College.
- Use networks from around the College and existing employers to determine new leads, use Business Link Wessex contacts, Dorset Chamber of Commerce, and yellow pages and web sites to build a more comprehensive database which is held centrally and available to all key staff engaged in employer engagement.
- The more employers are prospected in a highly professional manner, the more success the College will have.

### **Pricing and positioning strategy**

- Clear policy on payment terms and enrolment procedures, especially for new employers.
- Limited use of employer sponsorship – employers will be approached to sponsor a limited number of apprenticeships for deserving causes – young adults from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Research the competition – who is offering what? How much are they charging? Are we competitive? Gather market intelligence on a regular basis.
- Set a price the market will bear.
- Very important to create a value for money proposition in the mind of the prospect.

## Slide 6

- Strategic direction/leadership – vital but teamwork is also key.  
You can have the best strategy in the world but without effective teamwork and implementation, target outcomes will not be achieved.
- It is critical to deliver superb customer service for key stakeholders all the time.

## Slide 8

- How do we achieve targets year on year?  
Seek sponsorship from larger employers. (Barclays, Dixons, Marks & Spencer, Hilton International)

## Slide 9

- Rapid expansion of numbers of apprenticeships , at the same time taking care to improve retention and achievement rates.
- Additional employers developed by emarketing techniques and other promotional methods (Home page – web site)
- Gauge local demand and ensure that professional courses are introduced to cater for the demand
- Professional engagement – is there any other way? Strengthen and increase employment rates.
- Use CRM and database management techniques to ensure success.

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The College growth target of 5% year on year is challenging but achievable provided the following steps are taken.

- Excellent preparation of students who are work ready and consequently will stay the distance with the employer
- Robust financial planning and control regular meetings with College Managers to ensure we are on track and corrective action can be taken in good time.
- Instant action when faced with a problem with an employer, same day response, fast intervention to demonstrate a caring and professional attitude. Conflict resolution and possible retraining are key to achieving high completion rates.
- Effective M.I.S. is crucial – everyone needs to be aware who is contacting which employer about what so we appear to be ultra professional.
- Future strategic direction – business world is dynamic – we need to keep one step ahead – market intelligence which helps to inform future strategic direction.
- Never miss an opportunity to up sell to existing employers and also chase down every business lead to increase the number of employers in our portfolio, year on year.

- COVE status for all Centres is ambitious but achievable. We have to aspire to excellence over the next 5 years.
- Engage with former students who are now in a position of authority and can therefore put something back to the College which helped launch their career
- Continue to work with Government agencies, LSC, DTI, RDA etc, to be one step ahead when it comes to bidding for extra funds to engage with employers and improve employment rates of College leavers within the conurbation.
- The College must aim to achieve full employability of all its students in the near future. This enhances the reputation of the College locally, nationally and internationally.
- I would like to see the establishment of more sponsored programmes across the College (such as the Waitrose /Academy of Culinary Arts)
- Full employment – there is a need to collate statistics and the chance to report full employment would be a great way of showcasing success for the College.
- Finally, CRM is the key to unlocking the potential of employer engagement.
- If we can delight the customer every time we interface, success will breed success and targets will be achieved year on year.