

Childcare placements during a pandemic – Bridgend College case study

We have been supported by some of our excellent placement providers to enable our learners to complete their delayed placements. This has meant we are hopefully on track to enable these learners to complete their placements and therefore gain their qualifications. This in turn means they will be able to join the early years and childcare workforce or progress in their studies – albeit six months later than any of us planned!

For us, success has been centered around two things – communication and preparation.

Our department has a team of childcare assessors and they had regular communication with school staff before the placements were agreed, during the preparation time and while the learners were at the setting. Visits by assessors are kept to the minimum required and we held additional discussions by other appropriate means to suit all involved. All settings' health and safety requirements were adhered to throughout by learners and college staff.

The college has run a series of preparation activities – these have included Covid safe practices and school specific briefings tailored to the individual placements. All students are briefed regularly by the college centrally and this is reinforced by the teaching and assessor teams.

The college has clear expectations of safe working practices throughout the campus. Masks are worn in all communal spaces and regular hand washing and sanitising is expected. There are numerous sanitising stations across campus and it is now common practice for students to sanitise themselves and the equipment they use regularly.

Assessors have held preparation workshops with our learners to make sure they are ready for placement. These have included Covid-safe practices, alongside the usual preparation for practice activities. These have been held in immediate bubble groups as outlined below.

Within the department we have a zero tolerance on Covid-safe behavior – this was easily reinforced in the initial days, with supported entry to buildings establishing a 2m space, and masks-on and sanitise regularly rules. The whole staff team were active in reinforcing this and we stationed ourselves at the entry points for a few days to give reminders as needed. Learners soon got used to this new routine and it is now an automatic behaviour.

In class we have half groups to allow for plenty of space and good ventilation is maintained alongside the sanitising routines. These half groups form an immediate bubble and the courses are kept within a limited wider bubble with a small number of staff. This time on campus is supported with online and blended delivery.

Early feedback from our assessors and placements showed that use of the outdoor environment was a great way to manage assessment visits. We have also been fortunate enough to offer some of our learners the opportunity to work with young children from our

college day nursery in a Forest School setting. This has been hugely beneficial for the learners and children. Following the first session, one learner's reflection summed up their experience: "I have never smiled so much in my life. It's the best thing I've ever done."

We recently reviewed our delivery and early indications are very successful – learners are progressing and safety issues are being maintained. Our only development point is the need for more placement opportunities so our new cohort can start their placements alongside our delayed cohort.

Placement experience is a fundamental part of these courses and without it our students cannot achieve. As a staff team we all have fond memories of our placements when we were training and we really enjoy listening to the learners' experiences. Our assessor team is in the enviable position of seeing this first-hand. We are very grateful for those placement providers we are currently working with and welcome more joining us and making use of the guidance set out in this document.



Learners celebrating an excellent Forest School



Our Forest School Leader aka Ms Fox



Socially-distanced assessor and placement discussion