

Report on the First Year of PLACE 21

Ethics, Sustainability & Social Development



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Contents

1. Context and Introduction	3
2. The Nature of Place 21	4
3. Three Place 21 Developments:	5
3.1 Skills Convergence	5
3.2 Distance Travelled	8
3.3. Innovation	9
4. Ethics and Sustainability	10
4.1 Ethics	10
4.2 Sustainability	10
5. Equality & Diversity	11
6. Management and Governance	12
7. Conclusions	15

1. Context and Introduction

PLACE 21 is a set of new initiatives being implemented for learners with different vocational expectations at West Suffolk College, a Further Education College based in the City of Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk. Being new, it is important to report on PLACE 21 and this is the first Progress Report relating to the initial year of activity of PLACE 21 (2017-18). It is noteworthy that `Ethics and Sustainability` concepts and practices relevant to businesses, governments, and societies are being introduced to Level 3 learners in the first year, and onwards. These Ethics and Sustainability concepts/practices will also benefit the local businesses involved in PLACE 21 projects with the College. The framework for `Ethics and Sustainability` is attached under section 4 of this Report.

PLACE 21 provides `added value` for further education learners at different levels:

- through the way that `skills convergence` brings the classroom and work experience closer together;
- by distances travelled; and
- by the innovation introduced by PLACE 21.

Each of these `added value` elements will be outlined shortly; it will be seen that PLACE 21 brings together a range of initiatives to achieve change in these areas, as per the following Diagram.

A Selection of PLACE 21 – Key Initiatives/Projects in 2017/18



The PLACE 21 Level 3 qualification is not a nationally-recognised award but an approved, unregulated course. It is a pioneering vocational award recognised by NCFEⁱ and funded partly by the European Social Fund (ESF) Operational Program (2014-2020) and West Suffolk College. Some 100 students are due to start piloting PLACE 21 in September 2018 and complete in May 2019. About 50% of these students are in local employment in Small or Medium Enterprises (SMEs). A further 40-50 students began in January 2018 to test the classroom part of the award, known as the workbook. These students will finish in May 2018. Some of the students are following the Level 3 workbook and other less able or 'hard to reach' learners benefit from simpler workbooks, as explained later.

The vision of placing Further Education colleges in England – like West Suffolk College – in the heart of local communities was that of Baroness Sharp of Guildford, and the independent Commission of Inquiry, which she chaired. This Commission, established in January 2011, issued its Final Report in November 2011 endorsing the vision of colleges “as a `dynamic nucleus` at the heart of their communities”.ⁱⁱ The vision entails colleges fulfilling their main role of providing learning and skills training to young people and adults but, at the same time, extending the colleges` reach into their communities to establish a network of partnerships, so developing a further range of activities and engaging with other partners.

2. The Nature of Place 21

Place 21 is a `Project-based Learning Approach to Community and Employment in the 21st Century`. This vocational learning approach is divided into three different strands, which involve students in work; students out of work; and SMEs/micro businesses, as set out below:-

1.1. PLACE 21 (a)

This strand, PLACE 21 (a), provides training to people/students mostly employed – but few of them full-time – in SMEs and micro businesses. It aims to give them enhanced work experience opportunities and is particularly suitable for those at further education Levels 2, 3, and 4. Learners participating in PLACE 21 (a) will gain from this strand as it offers students extended project choices and content. An example of PLACE 21 (a) projects includes `Sudbury Town Centre Community and Small Business Project` (see earlier Diagram).

1.2. PLACE 21 (b)

This strand of PLACE 21 focuses on employers of SMEs and micro businesses. It encourages them to get involved in the design and development of training systems that are industry related. For example, AB Performance, a local micro business, is working with automotive students to show them how car mechanics operate at the high end of performance – that is, racing cars. Another example is the Thetford Business Forum project mentioned shortly.

1.3. PLACE 21 (c)

This third strand, PLACE 21 (c), supports people/students furthest from the labour market, and those facing multiple barriers to labour market entry. Through the main West Suffolk College campus in Bury St. Edmunds, and the College`s learning centres situated in deprived areas across West Suffolk, services are available to these candidates to develop new skills and build their confidence, leading to the “transformation of their life chances”.

Unemployed people are helped with opportunities to enter mainstream courses and to find sustainable work opportunities. For example, projects under PLACE 21(c) include `Special Initiatives for the over 50s` and support for the integration of migrants recently arrived in Britain.

3. Three Place 21 Developments:

3.1 Skills Convergence

Skills convergence, mentioned previously, refers to the need to bring classroom activity and work experience closer together.

Working with the Thetford Business Forumⁱⁱⁱ West Suffolk College has been seeking to bring about greater convergence and has achieved it in a number of ways:

- Introduced a Level 3 industry experience workbook (see below) to students and asked them to work through this workbook before, during and following their work experience;
- Prepared students for work experience by matching their interests with a relevant company from the Thetford Business Forum;
- Worked with companies to prepare them for the student`s placement;
- Hosted a Business & Student Engagement Programme at West Suffolk College on 13th March 2018. The purpose of this event was to showcase Thetford businesses, promote opportunities for students for careers with these businesses, and celebrate student work placements (some of which have resulted in job offers);
- Developed a follow up plan to ensure that the College continues to improve and create genuine “Skills Convergence” (see table below).

Thetford Business Forum –

Business & Student Engagement Programme – 13th March 2018.



Thetford Business Forum

Business & Student Engagement Programme

– Next Steps –

March 2018

	Action	Timeframe 2018/19
1.	College buy-in	April / May
2.	Endorsement from Thetford Business Forum (TBF) and agreement to come into college to talk to students (from September)	April
3.	Preparing materials for students (on top of existing workbook). E.g. Aaron Howlett's Thetford Businesses leaflet.	April/ May
4.	Planning (cross-college) to start end of May	May/ June
5.	Preparing students – from September	September
6.	Sector talks – from Thetford businesses	Sept/ Oct/ Nov
7.	EVENT – showcase and recruitment - Business & Student Engagement Programme	Nov 2018
8.	Work experience link ups	Nov/ Dec/ Jan
9.	Evaluation & Feedback Event	March 2019
10.	Plan next steps	April 2019

Skills convergence, then, means uniting classroom activity and work experience for students. As the background to skills convergence, it is necessary to understand more about PLACE 21. As stated in this Introduction, a Level 3 workbook is available for more able students as a `Work Experience and Industry Related Level 3 Customised Course` - being a new vocational award. The course prepares learners for the `world of work` in all sectors of the economy and for any position in the workplace.

The Level 3 workbook - a classroom exercise – focuses on familiarising students with work and the work environment. There are four units to the Level 3 workbook which have to be completed by students in a time frame of approximately 120 hours. This workbook is available in printed format and digitally – as a pdf or Word document – and shortly, there will be an interactive version.

The four separate work-related units within the Level 3 workbook are:

- Unit 1 “SELF AND WORK” which concentrates on, for example, the candidate’s character and strengths and includes curriculum vitae writing;
- Unit 2 a “WORK EXPERIENCE PROJECT” which requires students to research an aspect of work and present their findings in a professional style;
- Unit 3 deals with “ASPECTS OF BUSINESS” asking learners to identify the core “purpose” (that is, mission) of the business with which they are working;
- Unit 4 ETHICS AND SUSTAINABILITY which calls upon students to research ethical principles/practices in public and business life and also become familiar with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Two simpler workbooks have been created for less able or harder to reach students, below Level 3, and these will be referred to shortly under 3.2.

3.2 Distance Travelled

Distance travelled is a familiar concept within the ESF framework and refers to the progress made by ESF participants in their personal development and learning `journey`. Distance travelled is less about qualification outcomes and more about movement away from a disadvantaged position. It demonstrates how barriers have been removed and obstacles overcome in order for a person to make progress in their lives.

PLACE 21 has developed a range of opportunities which support this view of distance travelled and they include:

- Providing opportunities for disadvantaged people to develop their careers. Two recent examples are the recruitment of Aaron Howlett and Sibel Redzhebova (see next bullet point). Aaron was recruited to undertake research for PLACE 21. He has been studying at the College for several years. He has some special needs, as a person on the autistic spectrum. Aaron is very bright and in his second year of a business degree. He works for the PLACE 21 project one day per week carrying out

research. It is hoped that working with Aaron over the next year will enable him to develop key career skills that he can then use in mainstream employment. Aaron is expected to be offered full-time employment by the time he completes this work experience on PLACE 21 in October 2019.

- Sibel Redzhebova is an Accounting student who was recommended by her tutor for a position as Claims and Finance Officer for PLACE 21. As a long-term unemployed EU citizen whose first language is not English, Sibel has been supported by the organisation, Realise Futures, who have supplemented her part-time role with two additional days so that she can gain more experience working with PLACE 21. Sibel has demonstrated excellent skills and great commitment and is expected to be offered a contract to work with PLACE 21 over the project period.
- PLACE 21 has created two additional easier workbooks than the Level 3 workbook, as mentioned under 3.1. These are a Work Experience Diary which provides a framework for recording progress and distance travelled for participants undertaking work experience; and a RARPA (Recognising And Recording Progress and Achievement) workbook (Portfolio of Work) provides a similar framework, but focusing on personal development rather than work experience.
- PLACE 21 has funded a range of other interventions aimed at vulnerable people. These include support for young migrants who are learning English; residential programmes to support young people at risk of falling out of education; and a range of extra-curriculum activities specifically for vulnerable people.

3.3. Innovation

Place 21 has attempted to break new ground in the way that it engages learners, especially in relation to industry relevance. Whilst the Thetford experience has shown how beneficial it can be to engage a range of businesses in connection with work experience, West Suffolk College's work with the micro business, AB Performance, has shown how a business can influence course design and delivery. This initiative has resulted in the College purchasing the components for a racing car. College staff have designed a new course around the car build, and several other courses are involved in this initiative: for example, media students are recording the steps from delivery to race track; accounting students are involved in a costing exercise looking at all the car components; marketing students will explore options for branding and promoting the car; while design students are expected to become involved in painting the body of the racing car.

Working with partner organisations, and under the direction of the IMI (Institute of the Motor Industry), the College has identified a need for its provision to better reflect a motorsport-allied Automotive Engineering emphasis. The aim is to improve further progression prospects for students by supporting a broader range of industry sub-sector choices while providing an upgrade University entrance platform. The College intends to meet better the needs of a diverse range of employers, enhance the skills and experiences made available to students, and nurture their aspirations within this important industry

sector. This aim will be achieved by increasing the emphasis on key Engineering disciplines such as maths, properties of materials, problem solving and design within a focussed practical context. The context will be the development and testing of a racing car.

By providing a challenging STEM-based College environment PLACE 21 will harness the curiosity of the students, build their drive and their ambition, and develop self-confident, motivated learners ready to engage with productive technical projects. This project will enrich the curriculum, enhance the student experience, and build relationships with SMEs in the local area. In the case of the racing car, it will provide an important focal point for a range of cross-curricula activity, including Art & Design (body work design); accounting (costing the labour input etc.); marketing (track events – when the car is built); as well as the obvious engineering angles.

4. Ethics and Sustainability

PLACE 21 is building Ethics and Sustainability into the students' learning journey and there is a detailed section for students to complete on these subject areas in the Level 3 workbook.

4.1 Ethics

Ethical issues in business and government have become important in the last few years, pushed forward by headlines announcing unethical practices fuelled by greed and self-interest. In fact, unethical practices can occur in the workplace at local, national and international levels.

Unit 4 in the Level 3 workbook encourages students to question business practices and to report back on them.

In addition, both students, and the local businesses with which they are involved, can capture business actions and assess to what extent they are ethical and/or have become more ethical.

In the case of government ethics, students are introduced to the Seven Nolan Principles which set out the ethical standards of integrity, honesty and others, on which the British Civil Service and English local government are based.

4.2 Sustainability

The 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which replaced the earlier Millennium Development Goals, focus the learners' attention in Unit 4 of the Level 3 workbook to a range of problems to be overcome at local, national, and international levels, including poverty, climate change, and migration.

Students following the Level 3 workbook are exposed to the UN Sustainable Development Goals and they can adopt one or more of the Goals on which to focus their research.

The framework on Ethics & Sustainability for PLACE 21 has been drawn up by Dr Rosamund Thomas^{iv} from Centre for Business and Public Sector Ethics and is shown in the Diagram below. This attention to Sustainability in PLACE 21 forms part of the ESF contract.

Ethics & Sustainability Framework for PLACE21 -

Macro Level				Micro Level	
Who is involved? Identify all the parties.	Three levels of community	WSC Ethics Code of Practice. How does it relate to each of the community levels?	Ethics Committee - (part of steering group responsibility):	Students (and tutors)	Participating organisations
Students WSC staff Participating organisations Steering group members	Local	Character Strengths and WSC Ethics code of practice	Reporting; consultation; informing	Ethical conduct & character traits - how does their project reinforce the eight character strengths?	Ethical code of practice?
	National	Nolan Ethical Principles		Researching ethics/sustainability policies of a third party organisation (hopefully one that they are involved with - for their EPQ).	
	International	UN 17 Sustainable Development Goals (linking in with the five UK principles and the nine EU principles).		Ethics of research - taught 'module' - demonstrated in completion of ethics approval form (which will require students to specify in which ways their project meets different UN sustainability goals.	Contributing to student's research

5. Equality & Diversity

PLACE21 complies with all College policies and in particular, builds on the College's Equality and Diversity Policy. PLACE21 aims to put the College at the heart of the community. It can only genuinely do this if it challenges assumptions about access and opportunity. The project has put equality and diversity in the spotlight and several initiatives stand out as good examples of interventions which are making a positive difference to people's lives.

One student (Aaron Howlett, see 3.2 above) has been employed by the project to explore PLACE21 from a participant's perspective. Another student (Sibel Redzhebova, see 3.2 above) had been unemployed for several years and is now excelling as the PLACE 21 Finance and Claims Officer.

Several other curriculum initiatives focus specifically on helping disadvantaged people – including funding residential away day programmes; helping young migrants to integrate; supporting older learners through individualised learning plans; and providing tools and facilities to support young people from challenging backgrounds.

Throughout 2017 PLACE21 has reached out to people who face multiple barriers to participation, and has worked with companies to break down negative perceptions and

ingrained assumptions about recruitment. Several examples of this are highlighted in the Thetford Business-Student Engagement Programme.

Overcoming barriers which people face as a result of living in rural areas is a key target project for the project – and wherever possible PLACE 21 has tried to ensure that transport has not become a barrier to participation; again, the Thetford experience highlighted the need to plan travel options carefully to ensure barriers are removed. Interestingly, with the Thetford initiative the barrier was not about the rural isolation of the beneficiary, but the rural location of the business, which made it difficult for students to get to.

Equality and diversity is an integral part of PLACE 21 and is emphasised in the Three Pillars philosophy promoted by the College.

6. Management and Governance

In terms of governance, West Suffolk College has involved key community and business representatives from the locality.

ON THE BUSINESS SIDE, the following representatives have agreed to be part of a strategic Steering Group:

Jason Middleton – New Anglia LEP Programmes Manager and contracts holder for business support and Growth Hub management. Jason is supportive of this bid and sees the beneficial links between the growth hub and this proposed activity. His strategic reach will be of particular importance to this project.

Nigel Foyster – Handelsbanken Bury St Edmunds Branch Manager. In addition to extensive banking and business support experience, Nigel has knowledge and experience of working with the voluntary sector as well as with regional development agencies. Nigel is well known in the local community and will be an important source of critical evaluation for the project as well as a link to many small businesses.

Andy Bates – Founder of AB Performance, micro business in Buxhall. Andy is a keen believer in developing the skills of young people and is willing to play an active role in building alliances for that purpose.

Richard Bridgman – Chairman of Warren Services - Stowmarket, was recently awarded an honorary degree from University of Suffolk (ne UCS) for his work with apprentices. As a keen advocate of skills development of young people, Richard will be an important community voice to challenge assumptions and critically assess project progress.

Bury St Edmunds Chamber of Commerce is based here at West Suffolk College and they will play a key role on the Steering Group.

IN TERMS OF COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES, the following are part of the Steering Group:

Dr Rosamund Thomas - Director, Centre for Business and Public Sector Ethics which is based in Bury St Edmunds and Cambridge. The Centre undertakes research in the field of business and public sector governance, ethics and sustainability and its work bridges the divide between business and public sector accountability.

Marie McCleary – Finance Director of Havebury Housing, Bury St Edmunds. Havebury Housing is a social housing charity, a key employer in Bury St Edmunds, and manager of over 6000 houses in the community.

Krystal Vittles – Libraries Innovation and Development Manager - Suffolk Libraries. The importance of the libraries service to the local community has been demonstrated many times. Suffolk Libraries has a presence in all of the satellite towns around Bury St Edmunds and their involvement will be instrumental in both spreading the message about this initiative and providing a useful meeting place for specific project activities. With a regional overview as well as a community perspective, Alison's participation on the Steering Group will be critical.

IN TERMS OF COLLEGE COMMITMENT, several members of the Senior Management Team are also part of the Steering Group. These include:

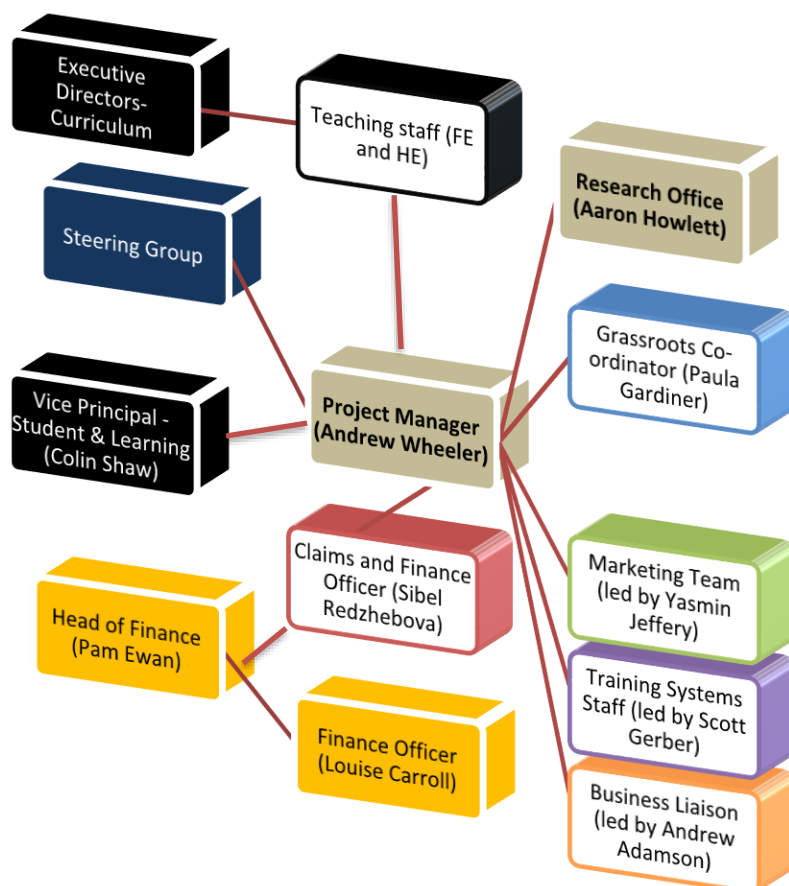
Colin Shaw – WSC – Vice Principal Student and Learning Support

Andrew Adamson – Executive Director – Curriculum

Gary Jefferson – WSC – Executive Director STEM

Christine Harvey – WSC – Executive Director Building, Construction and Service Industries

ORGANISATION STRUCTURE FOR PLACE21



In the ESF application, several themes and collaborative ideas were identified. Working with small businesses (e.g. AB Performance) was highlighted, the focus on communities was underlined and producing a sustainable development implementation plan was a requirement of the application. These and other commitments are essential features of the delivery plan.

PLACE 21 is *required* to undertake certain activities while other initiatives are *optional*. Additionally, PLACE21 is aligned to the West Suffolk College strategic vision, in particular its Three Pillars approach and this connection is formalised in the application.

Curriculum Initiatives within PLACE21 – the Adoption Process for New Initiatives

There is a framework for approval of new curriculum initiatives for PLACE 21 which is explained separately in the PLACE 21 Quality Procedures Manual.

7. Conclusions

Place 21 will be judged by the extent to which it adds value to existing activity. It is perfectly possible to comply with the 'letter' of ESF rules without actually making a difference to anything.

West Suffolk College has invested considerable time in applying for (a process, which took more than a year) and setting up a project management team to run PLACE 21. There must be a significant return in terms of added value and this is certainly something ESF will be looking for too.

This first Report has demonstrated how added value is being integrated into PLACE 21 through Skills Convergence; Distance Travelled; Ethics and Sustainability; the Steering Group established; and new Curriculum initiatives.

Andrew Wheeler at West Suffolk College, being both Chair of the Steering Group and overall Manager of the PLACE 21 award, has many responsibilities and he has succeeded in doing a fine job to date.

Rosamund Thomas, March/April 2018.

Notes

ⁱ NCFE is an awarding organisation recognised by the qualification regulators for England (Ofqual); Wales (Qualification Wales); and Northern Ireland (CCEA Regulation).

ⁱⁱ "A Dynamic Nucleus: Colleges at the heart of Local Communities", the Final Report of the Independent Commission on Colleges in their Community, Baroness Sharp Commission, November 2011.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Thetford Business Forum based in Norfolk, the East of England county which links to Suffolk and West Suffolk College, comprises a group of local businesses with whom the College is seeking to bring about greater convergence.

^{iv} Dr Rosamund Thomas has edited the book "Business Ethics", published as a printed book by Ethics International Press Ltd. in 2011 (ISBN 978-1-871891-04-1) and as an ebook (ISBN 978-1-871891-13-3).