

## Cube at Sheffield South City Learning Centre

[www.cubeweb.org.uk](http://www.cubeweb.org.uk)

The Cube project provides journalistic and media work experience for Year 10 and 11 students in Sheffield.

### Tags:

14-19, G&T, Literacy, Media literacies, Vocational/work-related, Diplomas, City Learning Centre

### Harnessing technology system outcomes:

Improved personalised learning experiences

Engaged and empowered learners

### Sectors:

Secondary (KS4), 14-19

### Innovation

The Cube project exemplifies how work placements for secondary school students can be redefined. It creates a work environment exclusively for placement students, giving the young people roles and responsibilities greater than normally afforded in a traditional placement. Technology is central to the innovation, allowing realisation of the focused and tangible target of producing an edition of an established magazine.

In creating a workplace environment, Cube avoids some potential constraints of school-based learning such as school timetabling, traditional roles assumed by students and adults and qualification-driven learning. Further, Cube exemplifies the personalisation of learning, with each young person active in negotiating the nature and direction of their work whilst on placement.

## Background

The Cube project was set up in 2003 by Sheffield South City Learning Centre (SSCLC) to address the need for young people to have access to authentic journalistic and media work experience. Cube is overseen by John Birks the SSCLC manager and co-ordinated by Vicky Morris, an educational media specialist, who uses industry partnerships to engage a range of media professionals.

Each placement runs for two weeks and caters for approximately 10 young people from a mix of schools. Cube's long-standing placements have an emphasis on journalistic writing for the magazine with the additional opportunity to produce material for Cube Radio, Cubeweb and Cube exhibitions, thus developing skills in interviews, graphic design, photojournalism and digital imaging. In 2007-08, Cube received additional funding from Mediabox, allowing the piloting of separate design and film placements to explore these areas in more detail

Cubeweb also provides a platform for Cube readers to publish their work through events such as writing competitions.

## Technology

Cube is based at a CLC where it has access to twelve computers with internet access. In addition, digital still and video cameras and MP3 recorders are used for creating and acquiring media. Material is produced and edited using Word, Audacity and Adobe Photoshop. The recent design placements also use a range of applications from Adobe Creative Suite including Adobe Premier.

*"I feel more confident on computers and laptops and using software to edit interviews and image."*

Cube reporter

During the placement the young people tend to use and rely on technology intensively. In addition to specific software skills, this leads to increased internet researching skills, general digital information management and computer confidence.

## Teaching and learning

Cube places emphasis on a supportive workplace environment. Learning is driven by the target of producing high quality completed material for a tangible audience within a deadline. The young people are encouraged to pursue personal interests and set their own agendas, guided by the project co-ordinator.

*"There isn't one way of working, it's a case of you look at who you've got, how they*

*like to learn, what they're interested in and what will keep them motivated for two weeks. Then you keep making sure their individual plates are still spinning."*

Vicky Morris, Project Co-ordinator

In addition, the placement is not tied to a formal educational assessment; instead, the young people are aware that they will leave with a detailed work reference. This helps to motivate and inform the choices that the young people make regarding their work.

## Impact

Cube Magazine is highly regarded among young people across Sheffield and the South Yorkshire area. Since starting, approximately 700 young people have undertaken Cube placements or have been involved in related projects. A further 500 or so have participated via Cubeweb.

The range of skills and learning experiences is undoubtedly broad, including specific journalism and communication skills, computer and technological skills, leadership and team skills and employment-related competencies. All this is underpinned by the personal development of the young people, particularly in terms of their confidence and self-esteem.

*"It just gives other people another side to you and it shows – yeah, I can do this!"*

Cube reporter

*"Even people who haven't got particularly high aspirations, it will help give them confidence and help them succeed. It helps define what you want to do."*

Cube reporter

Cube has received extensive positive feedback and has inspired several organisations to start their own magazines with young people, including Grounded in Rotherham (2006), which also runs from a CLC, and Lyrical (2008) produced by a group of Sheffield care leavers.

## Challenges

Cube's internet access was originally subject to the local authority's filtering policy. This proved restrictive, particularly as access to sites such as MySpace and YouTube, both essential for research, was denied.

Cube is unable to run from autumn 2008 due to a lack of finances. It costs approximately £1,000 per student to run in its present form. In previous years it has been partly funded by SSCLC core funding with the help of external sources such as Objective One funding through the South Yorkshire e-Learning Programme, and the schools-related initiatives Aim Higher and Gifted and Talented.

## Wider adoption

Vicky Morris stresses the invaluable support provided by John Birks, SSCLC and Sheffield schools in running Cube. She emphasises that if similar projects are set up they need to have a clear structure and ideally support from projects such as Cube. Further, it is important that schools and the relevant staff within them are provided with suitable information so that they can fully appreciate this different style of work placement.

Further, Ms Morris feels that the vision of a dedicated media work placement, not restricted by the demands of a qualification but guided instead by the young people themselves, is central to Cube's success, and this would need to be maintained if the innovation were to be adopted elsewhere.

