



EAST BERKSHIRE COLLEGE &
OCR

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A MENTAL TOUGHNESS
DEVELOPMENT PILOT

Background

In the 2104/15 academic year East Berkshire College, in collaboration with OCR (Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examination Board) organised a pilot to examine whether assessing and developing the mental toughness of students would have a beneficial impact for students and the college.

Mental Toughness is a personality trait which determines, in large part, how individuals deal with stressors, pressure and challenge irrespective of circumstance. The model used was the 4Cs model developed initially by Peter Clough, Professor of Applied Psychology at Manchester Metropolitan University and developed into a complete programme with AQR International. This includes a high-quality psychometric measure, MTQ48, which was the instrument used to measure mental toughness and the change in mental toughness.

Research from around the globe consistently shows a strong positive correlation with 4 factors important in the world of education:

- *Attainment* – up to 25% of the variation in performance can be explained by a person mental toughness
- *Wellbeing* – contentment and, with the ability to deal better with adversity and challenge, students sleep better. The correlation of the later with performance is now well established.
- *Positive Behaviour* – improved optimism, greater engagement and more ambitious – often irrespective of personal circumstances. Consistent with output from positive psychology.
- *Development of Peer Relationships* – again important in student wellbeing, this is also a factor in retention and attendance.

The model is widely described as an accessible description of Mindset. Mental toughness and its polar opposite, Mental Sensitivity, chime strongly with Dweck's descriptions of Flexible and Fixed mindset.

What was the pilot seeking to achieve?

EBC already had a pastoral care programme in place. One goal was to assess students at an early point in their college career and then later to see if the programme was making a difference to mindset. This was the formal part of the pilot.

An additional goal was to assess though qualitative means the extent to which tutors, staff and students thought that the assessment was useful and whether development activity made a difference.

Ultimately this was pilot within a greater objective – to raise aspirations, improve attainment - particularly amongst those about which there was little confidence, enhancing employability and increasing confidence.



What was done?

There were three components to the pilot.

1. Awareness Training for College Staff

Those directly involved with the pilot were provided with training in understanding the mental toughness model, what it meant in the context of developing young people and how mental toughness could be developed.

One of these, Linda Ball, Head of Teaching & Learning, also completed a Licensed User Training programme which provided her with an in-depth understanding of the model, the measure and its applications.

2. Assessment of Students using the MTQ48 measure

This served two purposes.

Firstly, in establishing a base assessment of student's mental toughness both individually and as a group. The group report showed the mean mental toughness scores for the group and the mean scores for each of the 4 scales and 4 sub-scales. At the end of the pilot, this was re-run to provide a picture of change in scores across all the scales and sub-scales.

Secondly, an output report was produced for each student. This provided a basis for feedback and discussion with students. Research shows that for many this self-awareness element is, for many, an effective intervention in its own right.

3. Mental Toughness Awareness and Development workshops for students

The programme introduced students to the concept what it could mean for each, why it was important to them and provided an introduction to tools and techniques for developing aspects of mental toughness. This included:

- Positive Thinking
- Anxiety Control
- Visualisation
- Goal setting
- Attentional Control

Initially targeted to embrace 65 students, some self-selecting and some nominated, the numbers swelled to 84. Students were all on Level 3 programmes covering a range of disciplines such as Construction, Beauty, Sport and Healthcare.



Outcomes

Essentially in three forms:

Response from students about the benefits they felt from both the feedback and the interventions. The vast majority of comments were positive. Sample comments include:

- The activities were great and the information that was shared was really helpful.
- It was useful and it made me see how to help when I am stressed.
- Be more positive. Things I will take away from the session is pay more attention to detail and give more value to the things that need the value. Encourage myself every day.
- I learnt lots of stress related techniques to help me calm down, which I found very helpful. I've learnt that there is nothing really to be nervous about and a nervous feeling is a good feeling not necessarily bad.
- Eye opening. Great help for self-development
- It was useful. It made me see how I can use different techniques to become mentally tough
- I really enjoyed this session. What you spoke about reflected on my life with the criticising and self-doubt
- It was okay. I already knew a lot of the stuff. Activities were fun.
- Will help me to find ways of managing difficult situations so I can move forward with my passions
- I will try and think of the positives from now on
- I will challenge myself more often
- Awesome
- Helpful. Great ideas for self-help.

This feedback is consistent with feedback elsewhere when working with young people. They know they are stressed, and that education can be challenging for some.

The model introduces the idea that being stressed is normal – it happens to everyone. The framework helps individuals understand what is happening to them and that it is in their heads – and this is different for everyone. Importantly the model shows individuals how something can be done about their mindset – and its benefits.

Assessment of Mental Toughness Scores Before and after the Pilot

The analysis of mean scores showed a positive shift in scores on most scales (sub scales in italics)

Scale	Pre-Pilot	Post-Pilot	Comment
Overall Mental Toughness	4.66	4.84	+
Control	4.60	4.92	+
<i>Life Control</i>	4.62	4.30	-
<i>Emotional Control</i>	5.15	5.36	+
Commitment	4.45	4.58	+
Challenge	3.88	4.60	+
Confidence	5.17	5.54	+
<i>Confidence in Abilities</i>	5.32	5.50	+
<i>Interpersonal Confidence</i>	4.62	5.14	+

The global mean score is 5.50.

On the whole this group's scores were slightly but significantly lower than the global norm. This was not unexpected. There was a positive shift on all scales except for Life Control. Life Control is where the sense of "can do" sits. It's a significant component of self-efficacy. The most significant positive shift was with the Challenge scale. This scale is often strongly related to openness to learning and preparedness to deal with change, the new and the challenging. The shift in Confidence scores was also significant – particularly with Interpersonal Confidence which was now in better balance with Confidence in Abilities. Interpersonal Confidence is associated with the extent to which people will express themselves, be assertive and questioning. Low scores often indicate those who will approach assignments, tests and exams in a minimal way – reluctant to put down everything they do know.

Staff and College assessment of the Pilot and impact

"East Berkshire College is very pleased to have been involved in this pilot with OCR and AQR. The College has always been concerned with developing the whole person – ensuring that not only is the student skilled and knowledgeable but that he/she is also confident about applying these skills and behaviours in life after college – in their work and their lives.

A key emphasis within our classrooms is developing a growth mind-set amongst our learners at all levels. The MTQ48 questionnaire and the programme has been very effective in helping learners to be self-aware about their mindset – to understand their strengths and to understand where their mindset may hold them back – and to support students in attending to their needs in this area.

The mental toughness programme is accessible.

It is easy to apply and fits extremely well with everything else we are doing and does appear to contribute to the development of our students.

EBC has already put in place plans to carry on and extend this work in the future – including training a key member of staff to take a lead on this inside the college."

Virginia Barrett, Deputy Principal, Curriculum & Quality
East Berkshire College

"At East Berkshire College, our focus is on improving life chances for all our learners – and this means equipping them with more than just a qualification. In an increasingly competitive world, we believe that the Mental Toughness programme gives our learners an edge. They are more aware of their own strengths and areas for development, they have a range of tools to call on in stressful situations and they have a "Can do" attitude.

I was so impressed with the programme that I undertook the training and am now a

Mental Toughness practitioner myself. I can see extensive use for the programme



within college, not only with learners but also in developing and supporting staff.

Who wouldn't want to have Mental Toughness?"

Linda Ball - Head of Teaching and Learning, Construction and Engineering
East Berkshire College

For More information contact
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