

CASE STUDY: HEART OF WORCESTERSHIRE COLLEGE

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Background

The Heart of Worcestershire (HoW) College is a large general Further Education and Higher Education college, providing vocational education from Entry Level to Level 5 to approximately 10,000 students. The college has four main campus locations, including Worcester, Malvern, Redditch and Bromsgrove, as well as a number of smaller centres across Worcestershire. HoW College is a relatively young organisation having formed around three years ago following a merger between North East Worcester College and Worcester College of Technology.

Understanding the role of advanced practitioners

Advanced practitioner-type roles at HoW College are called Advanced Quality Practitioners (AQPs). Prior to the merger, an advanced practitioner role existed at Worcester College of Technology, whilst North East Worcester College employed Quality Mentors. The Worcester College of Technology role was very focused on quality improvement, whereas at North East Worcester College the role centred on quality assurance. At the time of the merger, the two roles were merged together and it was decided to name the new role Advanced Quality Practitioner to incorporate both quality assurance and quality improvement, in line with the college's Quality Improvement Plan.

The role of AQPs at HoW College is wide ranging: a member of senior management explained *'their day-to-day role depends on what's required'*. As noted, the remit of AQPs extends across both quality improvement and quality assurance. With regards to quality improvement, one of the AQPs main responsibilities is to meet with all staff who have received a Grade 3 or Grade 4 through the lesson observation scheme. The college's internal grading system aligns closely with Ofsted rankings, such that a 3 corresponds to 'requiring improvement' and a 4 corresponds to 'inadequate'. Critically, AQPs do not carry out graded lesson observations.



I would say first and foremost it's improvement in teaching, learning and assessment... we identify those who may not be suited to a particular role and identify any detriment to students... So, first and foremost, it is improvement in teaching, learning and assessment for the students and then this is followed up by supporting staff.

Senior Manager

I imagine it to be fairly multifaceted but I think the two primary areas for them really are to assist professionals within the establishment that they're working in to improve their teaching, learning and assessment methods and to enable them to grow and develop as part of their Continuing Professional Development. And then the second strand is to kind of help develop and take on board and do some research into new practices, new methods and bring those into the college and educate the rest of the teaching professionals.

Tutor

Another aspect that AQPs are involved with is quality assurance. For example, they are currently in the middle of an assessment audit, which involves looking at written assessment work and undertaking an analysis of its quality. AQPs then feedback the standard of the work to managers

and leaders to identify where improvements can be made.

AQPs receive an uplifted salary and receive an average timetable remittance of 40 per cent. The AQPs interviewed felt that their role was very rewarding.



I think for me it's that whole developmental part of it, I think that's a really satisfying thing to be involved in.

Advanced Quality Practitioner

It's just really nice to be recognised that you are somebody who can support others.

Advanced Quality Practitioner

Two members of staff who were in the role of AQP last year have since left their posts and gone on to be promoted within the college. As such, staff view the role of AQP as a positive move for progression within the organisation. A member of senior management commented that this was fantastic for these individuals' career progression, although it does mean that they lose great staff.



It's a really important role and the sorts of people that we recruit are quite special in lots of ways within our sector... So we don't just take anybody who's, just for example, received three consecutive grade ones.

Senior Manager



The skills and attributes of a good advanced practitioner

The role of an Advanced Quality Practitioner requires a **broad skills-set** that goes beyond simply being a good teacher. This involves a combination of **high-performing teaching skills and personal qualities**. AQPs must have the ability and **confidence to effectively coach and mentor others** and have **excellent interpersonal skills** so that they are able to **build relationships** with colleagues and **act as role models**. Advanced Quality Practitioners must also be **highly organised** in order to juggle the many aspects of the role.



But when it comes to actually being in the post, of being able to coach and support...to have the confidence to deliver teaching and learning to other teachers, trainers and tutors.

Senior Manager

Activities

Activities carried out by AQPs are wide-ranging and include the following:

- Comprehensive support for Grade 3 and Grade 4 teaching staff.
- One-to-one advice, guidance and support.
- Planning and facilitating Continuing Professional Developing Sessions (CPD).
- Facilitating peer observations.
- Supporting new members of staff as part of a formal induction process.
- Reviewing lesson plans prior to formal observations to ensure they meet the Professional Standards.
- Planning and facilitating drop-in sessions/workshops.
- Quality assurance with regards to teaching, learning and assessment.

The AQPs meet members of staff who have received a Grade 3 or Grade 4 lesson observation to discuss what happened, identify development needs and develop an action plan to improve future delivery. AQPs may carry out peer observations with these colleagues before the individual is re-observed. This is **bespoke one-to-one mentoring support** that is focused on areas requiring improvement unique to that individual.

Support from AQPs is available to all members of staff who feel comfortable enough to proactively request it. The support is highly tailored to the different needs of teaching staff and is designed to be purely developmental. The AQPs have their own office space and they have an open-door policy. Because of fluctuations in the number of tutors they are supporting at any one time, they often run ad hoc sessions on a range of topics. The AQPs interviewed said that a large proportion of their time was spent discussing teaching practice and they felt that, for many colleagues, it was important to have someone listen to them who they could sound-board their ideas off.



AQP to me means if I'm a little bit stuck or I need some new ideas the Advanced Quality Practitioners are people who have been in education and teaching and assessing for quite a long period of time. They're quite a good resource if you're struggling with an element of your teaching so I'll quite often email them or I'll pop in here if they're in here and use them as a sounding board as well.

Tutor

Capability

HoW College encourages their AQPs to keep on top of changes within the sector, and when there is a necessity, the college will prioritise CPD for AQPs. In the past, AQPs have undertaken a coaching qualification although this year one of the team has created an award in mentoring. AQPs are also teacher trained and teach on the college's teacher training course, so are up-to-date with new practice. AQPs may also receive support from their own leaders and managers.

Outcomes



The biggest thing that tends to come out of it is getting staff to become more inspired again... it hits both ways, because we're involved in teacher training we've got people who are new in education with lots of new ideas and lots of thoughts, and we seek to incorporate those into our training. And then we have staff who've been doing the job for a long time... and what we do is, we go in there and remind them what kind of experience they've got and show them how they can freshen their approach.

Senior Manager

Our evidence shows that people who positively engage with Advanced Quality Practitioners, you don't see them getting a Grade 3 or 4 the following year or another time. You tend to see that they've learnt a range of skills and they employ them on a regular basis.

Senior Manager



Benefits of Advanced Quality Practitioners

- **Training sessions are more focused** and are targeted at areas that require development within the provider.
- **AQPs allow the college to identify and target inadequate practice more quickly and efficiently.** Learner exposure to inadequate professional practice is therefore reduced.
- **Staff very rarely receive a Grade 3 or Grade 4 again** following mentoring support with an AQP.
- **The AQP role provides support** to senior management.

Shared learning

Senior management felt that the most effective aspect of the AQP role was the coaching approach, *'because it means that staff are more positively engaged with it and the impact is a more sustained impact'*. They felt that this approach should be adopted by all leaders and managers throughout the organisation, not just the AQPs.



In some ways it's about understanding the skills that the AQPs have and the approach that they use and getting other leaders and managers to use that approach themselves because they work with staff as well. It shouldn't just be AQPs who assist their staff to move on, it should be the leaders and managers of those teams who help their staff to move on.

Senior Manager

The HoW College is part of a learning consortium. Their AQPs get involved with training and share best practice throughout the consortium.



Top tips for other providers

- Senior management at Heart of Worcestershire College feel that it is important for providers to have a clear idea about what they want the advanced practitioner role to achieve.



What works with AQPs is identifying what you want them to focus on, because they can't do everything, so you want them to have a clear target about what you're doing, to make sure that you establish what your ethos is around teaching and learning so that they can foster that, and to make sure that they're trained in coaching and mentoring.

Senior Manager



- It is important that the function of an advanced practitioner is separated from performance management, and that advanced practitioners themselves do not carry out graded observations.
- Advanced practitioners are more than very good teachers, and must be able to build lasting relationships, as well as keep on top of a demanding role.
- Heart of Worcestershire College feels it is essential that those in the advanced practitioner role remain active teachers. This is important in terms of credibility amongst staff, as well as allowing advanced practitioners to keep up-to-date with changes in teaching.