

City and Islington College

City and Islington College, a large further education college and a member of the 157 Group, is located in the London Borough of Islington. The college operates from five Centres – including a sixth form college - and in a variety of satellite venues in an area which is ethnically diverse and with prosperity evident alongside poverty and deprivation. There is college provision in all subject areas except agriculture and horticulture. Currently staff members stand at 1,000 and there are 5,000 full-time students with a high percentage of these enrolled on preparation for life and work programmes. The college is a LSIS Beacon college, is Investor in People (IIP) accredited and, at the most recent full inspection by Ofsted in the summer of 2008, judged to be outstanding overall and in all individual inspection areas.

The numbers of managers in the college total 120 within a three tier system, with a Senior Management Team (SMT) composed of the Principal, Senior Directors, a college management team composed of Departmental Directors and Heads of Service and a third level of curriculum managers and line managers. There is a high retention rate of managers at this college and consequently considerable experience but currently around a quarter of managers are junior managers with limited experience. The Human Resource Director, who determines the strategy for management development, is a member of the SMT and her team directs and manages all the human resource functions including training needs, analyses and the annual staff surveys. The budget for teaching and learning has been devolved to the Centre Directors but human resource has retained the budget for management development and support services.

In the current year the challenge has been to plan training and development with a smaller budget yet continuing to meet the needs of the organisation and maintain the quality of student course delivery for which the college is well known. The current year plan for management development reflects organisational goals, management responsibilities and contains activities to support each manager to carry out their role and responsibilities efficiently. One major issue identified in the past year was that middle managers are often called upon to deal with problems that line managers are actually empowered to handle. This meant that the workloads for middle managers were increasing as they were asked to undertake tasks that their subordinates should be able to cover. The college is addressing this in a number of ways, for example, through training in such areas as staff discipline in order to raise confidence levels of line managers to deal with situations related to poor performance or absence, encouraging managers to take a more systematic approach and giving managers more information and levels of support at appropriate times.

Newly appointed and newly promoted managers are required to work through a six month induction development programme for which the college has recently won a national training award. This programme is seen as fundamental in instilling the values of the establishment - integrity, fairness, trust and meaningful communication. The process involves managers undertaking training modules, both on and off-line, including areas such as health and safety and diversity, ICT induction, meetings and visits, self-directed study and background reading. When the 12 modules of this programme have been completed and verified as such, new managers have passed their probationary period and they then move on to the mainstream development programme. To support this induction process the college has a buddy system for each new manager - someone who is not the individuals' line manager but who acts as a point of contact for general queries and who can signpost to specific information or facilities. Human resource measure the impact of this induction programme determined by a series of quantitative and qualitative impact measures.

Coaching underpins the whole developmental ethos at this college and an area of the management development budget is allocated to this each year. Qualified members of human resource are actively involved in this and coaching consultants from outside the college are also used. Additionally, senior managers have had a group session on how and when coaching should be used, and what expectations the college has of the intervention. This also afforded senior managers an opportunity to discuss their own experiences and the strategies they have used with staff post coaching sessions. Facilitating this session internally did however raise some issues such as confidentiality and if repeated the Human Resource Director would like to involve managers from other colleges in the exercise to help overcome this and broaden the experiences that could be discussed.

Coaching is used in different ways and for different types of situations. It is seen for example as a particularly effective process when newly appointed managers have been in post for around six months, have completed their probationary period but are still new in terms of maturity as managers of staff and resources. A small number of managers have been pursuing a cross college management development programme which has been much valued by participants and the college. When this was completed human resource continued to support those learners through coaching in order that they could utilise effectively what they had learnt from the course.

The cornerstone of City and Islington's management development however is the use of a comprehensive Management Behaviour Framework, devised by the college and based on competences of the manager role. This includes assessment of performance using a 360 degree appraisal process and against criteria under nine separate behaviours – for example management of Change, leadership, handling conflict. All managers at all levels are assessed using a computer-based package completed by line managers and colleagues as well as an individual's own self-assessment.

The package produces a report outlining strengths and weaknesses as perceived by others and a chart indicates how this compares with the self-assessment. The process is seen as interesting and informative by most managers while for others the realisation that their performance is not viewed by others as they see themselves, has been difficult and in a small number of cases, significantly so. The Human Resource Director and the line managers then have to manage the reactions ensuring that individuals view results as positively as possible and without undermining their self esteem. The reports are only accessed by the manager concerned and their line manager and aside from performance are primarily used to identify what development needs are indicated. These can be addressed, through a variety of different options and as part of the annual appraisal process. Results overall directly inform the management strategy and annual development plan and the process is evaluated for effectiveness and efficiency periodically and informs future planning, quality and recruitment.

City and Islington believes that their management development system is very worthwhile and that results indicate that it achieves its aims and objectives. While acknowledging that theirs is a large college with a substantial budget set aside for management development support, they also feel that what they do could be replicated at a smaller establishment with limited finance. The Human Resource Director remarked

'The key is that it has to be a systematic approach, with basic tools to guide, a process of finding out what is important to managers, what the organisation expects of managers, hard data to establish areas of most need, and someone to drive the process who regularly monitors and evaluates what is undertaken. Linking with other establishments to pool resources for management development is always an idea worth examining too.'

The Human Resource Director believes that, since her appointment two years ago, there has been little or no demand for college support for managers to undertake full management qualifications largely because of the investment in time required for things such as portfolio building, although individuals are keen to take specific accredited modules especially if they relate directly to their current post.

For the future the college is exploring the introduction of a management qualification within the college that would be available to all managers and be based around the competency framework and mandatory management courses.