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Greenbank College

Where did they go? Using data to show a true picture of learner progression.

Summary

Greenbank College had problems around achievement on some long term programmes and was issued with a Notice to Improve for these areas. The College specialises in vocational courses for students with disabilities who might leave a programme for many different and valid reasons. Support from the Improvement and Development Service provided an expert check of data systems and their use and uncovered ways of adding data fields to reporting so that progression could be reported in detail. These reports provide invaluable information to management on effectiveness of courses and allow new students to see clearly where their predecessors have progressed to.

About Greenbank College

Greenbank is a registered charity based in south Liverpool that specialises in providing education, training, sport and recreational opportunities for people with disabilities, medical conditions and those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

Most learners are on courses leading to qualifications in subject areas such as functional skills, preparation for employment, hairdressing, catering and sport and leisure.

The challenge

The college received a Notice to Improve for some of the long courses offered, 30% were falling below minimum levels of performance. There were several reasons for this. Due to the nature of work in the college, groups are small and some very small, thus if one student drops out, they represent a big percentage. Students might leave to undertake medical treatment due to their condition. Others left because they got jobs, particularly those on catering courses. The college did not have accurate data about learner progression so it was not possible to say how many students got jobs, changed courses or left for other reasons. There was no methodology for collecting this information, except for example, word of mouth from tutors, who would report that a student had found a job. There was a reliance on paper based systems. In addition, any information they did have was not timely. The college has a roll on, roll off system for many programmes. Offering such flexibility is a positive factor in meeting student needs but made collection of progression data even more problematic. There was no one specific time when all students would be at the same point, for example, just completed their course or 3 months after their course. Management wanted to be able to

show where all their learners went on leaving, so they didn't just show as non achievers.

The activity

A package of support was proposed by the LSIS Improvement and Development Service. The support covered other aspects of provision such as delivery of functional skills and improving initial assessment. The support pertinent to the progression data consisted of an expert adviser carrying out a complete health check of data systems and their use.

The first thing that the adviser did was to check that managers were correctly interpreting data. The system in use is ProAchieve. The managers had realised that some of their provision was not being funded under the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) under Employer Responsive reporting. This led to a significant amount of underfunding. The adviser was able to validate that they had interpreted this situation accurately and supported them in making a case to the SFA to resolve the issue. This gave management greater confidence in their ability to manage and use data and with the adviser they turned to the issue of reporting on progression.

The first issue that the adviser picked up was that end dates for programmes were sometimes earlier than they needed to be. Extending them by a couple of weeks was a tip that gave some extra achievement time and reduced the likelihood of poor success rates. That bit of extra achievement time was particularly useful for flexible programmes with revolving start dates.

Next, the adviser looked at the data system and suggested adding an extra data field to record the possible progression options for learners when leaving a course. This might not improve success rates but it would give this specialist college reliable information which would have great benefits in explaining learner destinations to different stakeholders. The team considered what all the possible options for leavers might be and came up with a list. Not all the options are listed here but there are some examples:

- getting a job in their sector subject area
- getting a job in an unrelated subject area
- increased responsibility in their current job
- got a promotion in current job
- moved into voluntary work
- progressed to a higher level qualification

Having decided what data should be sought and how it would be reported through the current system, the team then considered how the information would be collected.

It was decided that tutors would ask about intended progression at exit interviews. The management information team would then contact learners between 3 and 6 months after leaving to check their destinations.

The outcomes

The management was delighted to find that they were able to get the current data system to report in the way they wanted. They had expected to have to buy an additional module.

Staff were much more confident about managing and interpreting the data they had.

They now had reliable information on progression of learners.

The impact

The management is better able to understand the effectiveness of courses by seeing what happens at the end to those who enrolled on them.

Reporting on progression helps the college make a case to Job Centre Plus about the usefulness of education and training.

People considering enrolling on a course know what happens to others who have done that course before.

There is often a perception for learners with disabilities that they won't progress or get jobs so being able to show clearly what the outcomes have been for previous learners provides a great recruitment tool and role models for disabled learners.

The college is able to celebrate the achievements of its learners even if they didn't get a full qualification.

'The reports will help Greenbank both recognise and celebrate the achievement of its learners and support more learners in progressing to Higher Education or work.'

Anne Kinsella: Education and Curriculum Manager.

The lessons learned

Greenbank College lacked confidence in their interpretation of data. In fact their understanding of a difficult funding situation was accurate but the adviser was able to reassure them and validate their interpretation. Accepting that they would benefit from expert help saved them a lot of time. The message to other providers would be 'Don't struggle, ask for help'.

They also recommend that providers find out if their current data system can perform more smartly before buying extra modules or new systems.

Greenbank saved money by getting more out of the current system.

Finally, understand that progression route information is useful to learners entering your institution in terms of providing motivation and role models, particularly for those with special needs.

Useful links

www.greenbankcollege.org.uk

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