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## **Hereford College of Arts**

### **Progress review as a retention tool in Performing Arts, a tool to be trialled in Higher Education**

#### **Summary**

Issues of attendance and retention in the Performing Arts department at Hereford College of Arts contributed to the department being judged inadequate at an Ofsted inspection. A range of support from the LSIS Improvement and Development Service helped bring about improvements. This case study looks specifically at how the introduction of systematic progress reviews led to retention in the Performing Arts department moving from worst in college to best within the time frame of just a few months.

#### **About Hereford College of Arts**

Hereford College of Arts is a specialist college for art, design and performing arts in the Midlands. Courses are offered from entry level to Foundation and Honours degrees. A substantial proportion of provision, 40%, is in higher education. The college aims to 'provide outstanding education and employability in the creative arts'.

#### **The challenge**

Retention and attendance are important success factors on any course but on Performing Arts courses, valuable collaborative working opportunities are lost if learners are absent. This was the issue facing Hereford College of Arts in 2011 and was noted by inspectors who judged the Performing Arts department inadequate in April 2011.

The poor retention arose from several factors. Insufficient initial advice and guidance resulted on learners sometimes being placed on courses without being fully aware of the course requirements and expectations. Effective procedures to track the individual progress of students were not in place so issues regarding absences and poor progress were not adequately addressed.

#### **The activity**

The LSIS Improvement Development Service provided support to the college. Advisers supported improvements on several themes but one key element of support focussed on the introduction of progress review procedures and documents.

Advisers worked with staff to develop a comprehensive system to monitor and review progress throughout the entire learner journey. The process now starts at interview where information gathered from learners allows staff to identify those at risk of failing.

Learners next carry out a review of their own progress on induction. This early review sets the framework for the rest of the programme. It means learners begin to take ownership of their learning and get used to setting short term targets. The tutor reviews the targets with the learner and makes sure they are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time constrained, that is SMART.

A key feature of the new system is the regularity of review. Every 6 weeks, learners know that the usual timetable will be replaced by reviews, covering attendance, punctuality, independent study and research, completion of assignments and contribution in class. Functional skills targets are incorporated into the review.

These individual student reviews feed into a course review as tutors aggregate the progress information on their whole group. The course review information is then fed into FE management team (FEMT) meetings and senior management team (SMT) meetings and key trends discussed. The SMT are then able to report to governors via the Academic Quality & Standards Committee on individual course progress and any actions deemed necessary.

Alongside the review process, a new online register captures attendance and punctuality data, so that monitoring is speedier and more accurate.

A further feature of the support was working with a Beacon college. Reciprocal visits were made to discover new ways of doing things. From this arose some ideas that are currently being developed to enhance the new procedures. For example, curriculum leaders will present course information to SMT 3 times a year and in HE 2 times per year. This allows curriculum leaders to claim ownership and responsibility for course performance.

### **The outcomes**

The college now has a set of procedures and documentation for progress review which is tried and tested. It is already incorporated into the ethos of the college and a regular part of the college calendar

Reviews readily provide contributions to the self assessment report which is now an ongoing, live document, revised and contributed to by all staff.

There has been a marked change in student expectations; they have greater ownership of learning and progress. They are more independent.

Although the progress review system was introduced to remedy problems in the Performing Arts department, it is already used in all other college departments and an adapted version is to be piloted in the HE courses offered at the college.

### **The impact**

The impact on retention has been immediate. In the current year it is 100% on Performing Arts courses. These were once the worst in terms of retention within the college and are now the best.

Attendance has also improved and is now 93% across college

The progress review system makes the staff's job easier. They have an effective system to follow at specific points, built into the academic calendar, and time is identified to do it, rather than it being an additional task that has to be managed within normal teaching weeks. Staff are confident that they know what they have to do and when; the procedures have impacted on staff behaviour in that they accept that reviews are an essential part of their role in meeting the needs of the learners. Having piloted the system this year the College is commissioning a commercial software package to further ease any administrative burden on staff.

### **The lessons learned**

Hereford has a high proportion of HE provision and the college is in a good position to take good practice in FE and adapt to suit HE. Formal progress reviews are seldom apparent in HE but in this college, procedures will be adapted to suit the needs of HE learners.

Involving learners actively in review makes a tremendous difference to their independence and ownership of learning.

A student commented in a recent college satisfaction feedback questionnaire: 'So so much better than when I began the course 5 years ago and left –The course and timetable are well organised. Deadlines are clear'.

Richard Heatly, College Principal, added: 'LSIS support and advice have enabled us to move forward very rapidly to change the culture within the college by introducing systems that really focus on the individual learner's whole journey. We're very optimistic that these will adapt well to provide the same effective support at HE.'

### **Useful links**

- <http://www.hca.ac.uk/>

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