

PRD project – case study: Phase 2

Developing Higher Education in Further Education



Project title - Improving the quality of the student experience through peer processes

Worth reading if you are interested in:

- Peer Review systems

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Name of Peer Review and Development (PRD) group: Hull College

Participating organisation(s):

- University of Huddersfield
- Trafford College
- Wakefield College

What was the original PRD project designed to achieve?

In Phase 1 of the project we set out to ...

(please indicate **why** you used the approach that you did)

Not applicable to this PRD Project

How did the Phase 2 activities embed or extend the work undertaken in phase 1 of the project?

In Phase 2 we wanted to....

Develop and extend work undertaken in 2011-12 to investigate peer processes currently employed in HE in FE. The aim of the project was to identify and pilot a robust process to assure the quality of learning and teaching, based upon peer processes.

The focus for the project emerged as the academic community began to engage more directly with higher education pedagogies, research-based learning and teaching and opportunities for continuing research and scholarship at subject level.

Building upon the success of the 'Teaching Squares' project undertaken in conjunction with Hudcett (Huddersfield University Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training) The project intended to establish the most effective ways of providing developmental feedback, at Higher Education level, and within subject specialisms to support the development of learning communities.

...and we achieved or are working towards achieving...

Eventually four models were identified as being suitable in terms of content from which we would be able to draw up a proposed model; however it was considered appropriate that staff should be consulted again in order to check whether aspects of these models would allay fears or support views expressed at the earlier conference.

These models were presented to HE staff at a Teaching and Learning Conference held on 14 February 2013 in the form of a 'Speed-Dating' activity. Staff were divided into four groups and given the outline of a model in three minutes. They were then asked to comment on three flip chart sheets headed: 'I like...', 'It concerns me that...' and 'I have a question...'. They then moved to the next model, the activity being carried out four times.

The feedback papers were discussed by the working party at a meeting the following week and the comments were used to create a proposed model which was shared with the Partner Organisations for evaluation and feedback.

Proposed model

The focus of this process is upon professional collaboration to improve learning and teaching. It should be stressed that the observation is of the session and not the teacher.

The observee identifies a session for observation. The reason that a session is selected could be linked to an area for development which has been identified through the course team, the faculty or through reflection by the individual; perhaps as a result of formal or informal student feedback, the formal college observation process, external examiner reports or other quality processes. Alternatively, the observee may be intending to explore a new strategy or approach and require feedback.

The observee chooses an observer who can be from the course team or elsewhere in the faculty. A meeting is then held to discuss the session and to formulate a plan for delivery. The session is then observed and a further meeting is held to discuss what happened. There is one piece of documentation to be completed for the whole process which is divided into three sections. The headings on the documentation are as follows:

- What was my focus? (To be completed during the first meeting)
- What happened? (To be completed during the observation)
- Outcomes/Reflections/Future action (To be completed at the final meeting)

Dissemination of any findings, including identification of good practice can be shared through staff development sessions. A copy of the documentation is kept by the observee. The faculty Quality Manager also receives a copy in order to identify faculty trends and developments. The session is ungraded.

Implementation

Initially this is to be piloted within selected course teams on a faculty basis. The intention is that a comparison will then be made of the experience to examine whether there were any differences between faculties and depending on the outcome a pilot may then be carried out which will involve cross-faculty pairings. Prior to the initial pilot, staff from both faculties will attend a briefing session to establish and standardise processes.

The proposed model is based on the model of "Supported Experiments". Joyce and Shower's (2008) work suggests that experimentation has been shown to significantly benefit the ethos or culture in a college. Petty suggests "As teachers experiment more both their problem solving skills and their morale improves and their team becomes more cohesive and responsive to difficulties of all kinds".

Partnership Organisations

The feedback from the Partnership Organisations has been supportive and constructive.

Summary by Trafford College

We think the proposal is a sound one and has the potential to improve teaching, learning and assessment, as it would encourage teachers to take a risk with their planning and to try new approaches, which may be out of their comfort zone, but would be encouraged by the support of a colleague throughout the process. It incorporates effective principles of project management in that you have carefully considered:

- *The evidence base underpinning the project*
- *How it could operate alongside your current graded system*

The process surrounding the supported experiments, rolling it out, piloting it, observee involvement and ownership, post session professional discussion and self - evaluation

- *Dissemination of findings and trends incorporated into future development*

Other issues to consider for a college whose teachers may teach on Further Education as well as Higher Education programmes are:

- *The need to be rigorous enough to be Ofsted ready*
- *Two completely different approaches for HE and FE may be confusing for staff*
- *While that is not a problem in itself, it could well be when grades are linked to performance*
- *In that case which approach should be adopted for staff who teach both?*

Summary by Wakefield College

Not yet received however there has been a request for further comment on the proposed model.

Summary by University of Huddersfield

I have read the report. I am pleased that you have piloted an appraisal/observation process that is based on a peer approach and that is not graded. I understand a number of FECs are actually moving towards this kind of model for their FE observations - that is, the focus is on development rather than a 'one-time' judgement. It will be interesting to see how this impacts and supports real development. Many thanks for giving me this opportunity to read and comment on this.

What has been the main impact of the project and how will this affect the key stakeholders such as learners, the PRD group and participating organisations?

Definition – impact = “A change of behaviour as a result of engagement with the PRD activity”.

The **main impact for the learners** and their preparedness for the HE environment and provision has been or will be....

Learners will benefit from the development of a teaching culture where innovation and an active, supportive community of practice are celebrated and supported. This will enable tutors to respond effectively and flexibly to student needs relating to all aspects of their study within the HE environment.

Students will also be able to see that their tutors are actively engaged in and modelling continuing professional development reinforcing the concept of reflective practice and research as effective tools for high order learning.

The **main impact for the participating organisations** has been or will be...

The opportunity to examine and evaluate a model for peer observation which may assist them in the development and examination of the processes which operate in their institutions.

The **main impact for the PRD group** has been or will be....

The establishment of a supportive network across institutions to encourage the sharing of good practice and the opportunity to offer a ‘Critical Friend’ approach in future developmental projects.

Has there been an **impact for other stakeholders**?

Staff working in HE at HCUK have had the opportunity to contribute to the development of a process which directly affects their practice.

This has enabled a sense of ownership of the proposed model which will hopefully mean that staff will become engaged and pro-active in its delivery and implementation, embracing the spirit of the process in terms of support, development and innovation which it aims to achieve.

What will be done differently and what are the key learning points?

The next stage would be to pilot the proposed model and review its effectiveness, taking into account comments made by partnership organisations.

Key Learning from this project would be:

- This was an appropriate topic for discussion, debate and review
- Staff will respond positively to requests for assistance with development of systems and strategies when an appropriate environment is facilitated.
- Partner organisations offer a valuable perspective and should be fully involved in the process

- Student views also need to be gathered to triangulate the developmental process.
- A key area for further discussion is whether the proposed model should replace or run in tandem with the current model. Trafford College have stated that any process should be 'rigorous enough to be Ofsted ready' however as a process concerning HE there is an argument that the emphasis should be on appropriateness for QAA and FDAP; therefore there is potential to separate from the current model. A request has been made to Wakefield College to comment on this debate

What resources should be shared with the FE and Skills sector?

The proposed model which is incorporated into this case study may be shared.