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John Ruskin College Transforming Learning

Summary

John Ruskin's 'Learning Model' has been a key driver in the swift improvements achieved since their inspection March 2010. Previously judged inadequate overall and in a number of key areas, the newly appointed Vice Principal took a pro-active approach and developed their own model for learning with support from LSIS Advisers. The model takes a unique approach which is designed to empower and motivate staff and students to transform learning. Re-inspection May 2011 highlighted the impact of this initiative and the dynamic approach of the leadership team when grades dramatically improved to 'satisfactory' and 'good'.

About John Ruskin College

John Ruskin College provides vocational courses in South Croydon. Courses are delivered in applied science, arts and media, business, information and communication technology, hairdressing, beauty and spa therapies, health and social care, sport, literacy and numeracy and English for speakers of other languages.

The college has around 1,000 full-time students, of which 62% are from ethnic minority groups. Most students are aged 16 to 18; approximately 170 are aged 14-15. 39% of students study at Level 3, 28% at Level 2 and 33% at Foundation Level.

The challenge

In March 2010, Ofsted judged the college to be inadequate for overall effectiveness, outcomes for learners, leadership and management and two of the four subjects inspected. Prior to this, AS and GCSE success rates had been in decline, some close to Minimum Levels of Performance. In addition senior managers were aware that standard staff development activity was insufficient in fully meeting the individual needs of all staff.

A radical decision was taken to deliver a purely vocational curriculum from September 2010, concentrating only on what the college did best. The newly focused curriculum offer provided an ideal opportunity to develop fresh approaches to both learning and staff development.

The activity

Between September 2010 and March 2011, a team of LSIS Advisers was assigned to provide support to the college through the Improvement Adviser Service (now the Improvement and Development Service) and the High

Quality Managers programme. This covered a wide range of activity spanning leadership and management and teaching and learning. As part of this support, one adviser worked closely with staff to develop and embed a new model of learning.

The adviser initially worked with the Vice Principal (VP) to design a staff and student consultation; the collated outcome identified the content of the 'John Ruskin College Learning Model' (see attached). Students were asked what they would like to see every day from their staff and what helped them perform at their best, and teachers were asked similar related questions.

"It was essential that the components of the learning model came from staff and students. They are the people who experience it, so they are the experts. They know what it is that they want; what does and does not work for them. The key was to find an approach which brought all that together." (Mandeep Gill, Vice Principal, John Ruskin College)

The model summarises the college's shared understanding related to three categories:

- Learning is best when...
- Learning is best when the teacher...
- Learning is enhanced when...

A competition was used to identify the best student designs of the learning model which were displayed around the college.

The VP decided to implement the model using the concept of 'Supported Experiments' which he knew had been successful at other organisations, this was supported by additional consultancy from the Learning and Skills Network. The approach involved asking every tutor to identify an experiment which related to an aspect of the learning model; one which they felt would have a positive impact on success rates. Regular coaching sessions supported staff to run their experiments and to measure and analyse the impact. This acted as both a means of improving success rates and a differentiated staff development opportunity.

Another strand of implementation was to embed the model within the revised lesson observation policy and process. The LSIS adviser provided training and mentorship for observers and heads of department. Input included:

- New observation system and forms with aspects of the model embedded
- The Transforming Learning Model
- Equality of opportunity and differentiation
- Observing workshops
- Action planning for improvement
- Observation feedback
- Joint observations with some observers to validate their judgements and grades, including action plans

"The joint observations had huge impact. We needed to know that observers were making accurate judgements and were feeding back effectively. The

adviser's reassurance in our expertise was crucial in taking the model forward." (Mandeep Gill, Vice Principal, John Ruskin College)

The adviser went on to support staff in developing their 'Quality Assurance Policy for Planning Learning and Teaching', aspects of which are currently being used to create and develop other policies which will cumulate into one overarching teaching and learning document.



The outcomes

During the LSIS support period outcomes included:

- A new learning model which was understood by both staff and students
- The successful pilot of the learning model and related lesson observation system which have since been rolled out.
- The quality assurance policy for 'Planning Learning and Teaching' which provided clarity for staff regarding expectations and standards

The impact

The May 2011 re-inspection grades reflected the impact of rapid improvements throughout the college, taking overall effectiveness and outcomes to a grade 3, and capacity to improve, quality of provision and leadership and management to grade 2

2012 data demonstrates longer term impact of the learning model. Since 09/10 cumulative attendance has risen 8% to 88.4%, and the lesson

observation profile shows a 16% increase in lessons which are good or better to 80%.

The lessons learned

In terms of designing and implementing the new learning model at John Ruskin, Mandeep Gill considers the following factors critical to their success:

- Consult all staff (teaching and support) and students during the design process to gain ideas about what will and will not work, and get them involved with every stage of implementation as part of their learning experience
- Ensure the learning model is articulated well both for and by students at different levels, e.g. entry level to level 4
- Ensure you have a clear vision about how you will bring the model to life; this was a key challenge for us. We found the use of Supported Experiments worked very effectively
- Embed the model within key aspects of teaching and learning such as the observation process; collate the evidence which relates to the learning model through this process in order to identify greatest impact and areas for improvement
- Review the model – as your staff and students change, so will your model; this aids sustainability.

Useful links

John Ruskin College website www.johnruskin.ac.uk

Links to related case studies

If you would like to know more about this case study, contact Mandeep Gill, Vice Principal - Transforming Learning

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