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## **Kirklees College**

### **Outstanding support for Kirklees Senior Leadership Team from Barnsley College**

#### **Summary**

Following a period of major complex changes, including merger, two new build projects, a restructure, poor inspection results and cash flow concerns arising from four years of financial deficit Kirklees College was in need of support to move forward. The Improvement and Development Service provided advisers to work with the newly appointed Principal and his leadership team. In addition, the service funded support from a Beacon provider, Barnsley College. Senior Management at Barnsley provided mentoring and feedback, enabling prioritisation and supporting effective decision making. In short, they provided a critical friend. A re-inspection monitoring visit in December 2011 found great improvements within just a few months, reporting significant progress in key areas.

#### **About Kirklees College**

Kirklees College was formed through the merger of the former Huddersfield Technical College and Dewsbury College. The college is a large FE college with a wide range of vocational courses from entry to full honours degree level. The college is in the midst of a building programme with a new campus at the Waterfront Quarter in Huddersfield opening in 2012 and a specialist engineering and motor vehicle centre on St Andrew's Road, Huddersfield.

Barnsley College has been recognised as an outstanding college by Ofsted and has been awarded Beacon Status by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS).

#### **The challenge**

From 2009 to 2011 Kirklees College had a period of complex changes. First there was a merger, then a restructure which resulted in new managers throughout departments. The merger resulted in deterioration in financial health and was followed by an inspection with unexpected poor results. The management team had worked hard following the merger, they felt the changes were beginning to have impact but they were devastated by the inadequate judgement at inspection. A new principal was appointed in June 2011 to lead the team to bring about improvements. Since then the leadership approach has been based upon a risk based assessment; building upon areas where progress was being made whilst incrementally reducing the expenditure base of the college. A comprehensive overhaul of mission, strategic objectives, policies and processes has been undertaken. A package of support was approved by LSIS Improvement and Development

Service. Advisers worked in some areas of the college but the bulk of support came from Barnsley College working alongside Kirklees College management. Barnsley College is renowned for its dynamic leadership and was recommended by the Skills Funding Agency as most suitable for offering support. The Kirklees principal welcomed the support but was keen to work in partnership rather than be directed. He wanted to co-ordinate the project himself and do it the 'Kirklees way'. By this he meant that the project must recognise the measures for improvement that had already been put in place and build on them. Senior managers from both colleges worked collaboratively, reporting on progress to the Kirklees principal. They established a close working relationship that was supportive yet challenging.

The Kirklees principal says

*"The processes of quality and financial improvement have been incremental rather than revolutionary. I took the approach of building upon solid foundations and strengths so that the student experience and outcomes were not put at risk.*

*External support has been negotiated with this strategy at the forefront of our thinking and while we have not adopted wholesale models from the support, they have assisted our thinking and development "*

The Barnsley College deputy principal's role was to be that of critical friend. Barnsley College senior and middle management provided targeted support as required.

### **The activity**

The support began with a series of familiarisation meetings and a presentation to the whole staff at a staff training day so that staff knew about the project and developed a sense of common purpose and clarity of focus to drive improvement.

Initial meetings with the senior leadership team served to provide a focus for all future work, established priorities and identified the work to be done producing a position statement.

Support was on-going over a period of a few months. During this time, Barnsley College senior management regularly attended meetings and participated in decision making including the following:

- Developing an understanding of the key requirements of a highly effective performance management system, development and implementation
- Full data analysis identifying areas of underperformance and high performance
- Review of training and development needed for key managers
- Development of embedded working practices and intervention strategies
- Production of an incisive, accurate and evidence based self assessment report
- Preparation for inspection

Besides attending meetings with the Kirklees senior leadership team, the Barnsley support team attended case conferences to review progress; there were combined management seminars and regular liaison via telephone, email and the review of documents.

There were formal review meetings with the Skills Funding Agency and these too were supported by Barnsley College.

Andrea Machell, Vice Principal for Curriculum and Quality at Kirklees, said

*“The college, and particularly the leadership team, found the relationship with Barnsley College challenging but supportive, it allowed us to benchmark, provided us with coaching and mentoring and was good fun along the way. The process gave us confidence and we were able to build on the foundations and successes that we had already secured”*

### **The outcomes**

The Kirklees senior management team found that their confidence and enthusiasm were restored through the positive support they were given.

Similarly, the Skills Funding Agency became more confident in the senior leadership team, recognising that they had developed an incisive target driven approach to leadership and management.

The Self Assessment Report is now rigorous and clearly identifies areas for improvement with associated intervention strategies.

There is a clear focus on performance with clear targets at every level that everyone understands. There is swift intervention if they are not met.

Data is used in a more effective way, for example, rather than just benchmarking against national averages, but assessing the college's position in percentiles and showing improvement.

Working with Kirklees College was a very positive experience from the Barnsley College perspective. The College gained an insight into the workings of another college with a different culture to their own, and were able to further advance their own understanding of change management and explore various associated implementation strategies. It gave the opportunity to further develop their own staff in terms of both leadership and management. “Challenging, fun and rewarding – I thoroughly enjoyed working with Kirklees College staff and providing a bridge between the two respective organisations. The underpinning theme of colleges working together and supporting each other via LSIS is proven as successful and to the benefit of learners.” (Phil Cook, Deputy Principal, Barnsley College)

### **The impact**

A re-inspection monitoring visit in December 2011 found significant progress in self assessment and improvement planning.

The Ofsted report says

*“Since the last inspection, the college has greatly strengthened its approach to self-assessment and quality improvement”.*

*“Quality-improvement plans are better focused on the impact provision has on learners.”*

Success rates improved in 2010/11 by 12 percentage points at every level. The overall retention rate improved by five percentage points, although this is still a key theme for the college as they look for further improvement.

### **The lessons learned**

Kirklees advise that providers do not underestimate the impact of going through a merger and the change it will bring. Staff who have been in post for a long time may be entrenched in ways of working and find change difficult. It is important to be outward looking to the rest of the sector to find good practice and realise that the Further Education sector is dynamic and the college has to keep up with new ideas.

Developing partnerships can open your mind to new ways of doing things and it is very useful to have a critical friend to support you in striving for improvement.

Kirklees have found that monitoring performance and expecting high standards do improve performance.

*‘Do not be frightened of hard decisions and difficult conversations’* says Andrea Machell.

### **Useful links**

<http://www.kirkleescollege.ac.uk/>

<http://www.barnsley.ac.uk/>

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