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Aspiring To Excellence



An Excellence Gateway case study

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Easton College: Improved understanding of student progress in personal skills using a steering wheel.

Summary

The college needed to stimulate students in foundation learning to develop their personal and life skills. Qualifications used seemed a poor measure of development in the key skills required. So the college has developed a 'steering wheel' outlining six areas of personal development against which students are assessed. This has proved to be a great motivator of students to make progress both in their foundation programme and in progressing to further courses in the college or elsewhere.



About Easton College

Easton College is a small specialist land based college based in Norfolk, and serving the needs primarily of rural communities across Norfolk and East Anglia.

The challenge

The recently revised main vocational qualifications taken by foundation learners had lost their previous grades of pass, merit, and distinction, and with it the ability to record some aspects of student progress. The college wanted to incorporate and record the progress students make through the academic year in vital personal and transferable skills. Such a record could be used with students who wished to progress to a further course at Easton or elsewhere. A visual tool was needed for each student which could be shown during an interview for a further (often level 2) course, to show their strengths, and especially how they had worked on any weaker areas to develop their personal skills.

The activity

Easton College ran a pilot scheme in 2010-11 to record the developing personal skills of foundation learners. The model developed and tested consisted of a circle with 6 segments each representing an aspect of personal development. The circle was dubbed 'The Steering Wheel', each part of which can be coloured red, amber or green depending on the degree of progress noted.

Formal reviews of 'The Steering Wheel' for each learner are carried out 3 times a year to coincide with literacy and numeracy assessments and reviews of targets. They are also designed to fit in with opportunities to feedback learners progress, for example as part of parents evenings.

Performance of a student for each of the six segments of the 'steering wheel' may be represented by red, or amber, or green.

The six areas against which student performance is assessed are:

1. Independent learning.

Red: Needs regular academic support.

Amber: Some academic support required.

Green: Needs little or no academic support.

2. Time management:

Red: Does not work in lesson time.

Amber: Sometimes works in lesson time.

Green: Always works in lesson time.

3. Attendance. Assessment for this is linked to the college electronic register system and tries to make judgements similar to any which might be made by Ofsted during inspection, noting the college target of 95% attendance.

Red: Below average attendance.

Amber: Average attendance.

Green: Above average attendance.

4. Punctuality/ Assessment is linked to the college register system.

Red: Regularly late for lessons.

Amber: Sometimes late for lessons

Green: Always on time.

5. Conduct.

Red: More than one verbal warning pending.

Amber: One verbal warning pending.

Green: No verbal warning pending.

6. Meeting deadlines. This is assessed using evidence from assignment tracking.

Red: Two or more consecutive assignments handed in late.

Amber: One assignment handed in late.

Green: Always hand in work on time.

Student performance as illustrated by the steering wheel profile is formally reviewed every 12 weeks. Each time the tutor will comment, and the student will be rated as red, amber or green for each aspect. These comments are deliberately kept positive, aiming to show the learner and others that, and how, they are making progress from their starting points.

During further, weekly individual tutorials, the students' role in improving their profile is discussed. Information is entered onto the college VLE if appropriate and smart targets transferred to each students 'star' (progress) chart. In this way, learning support assistants in classroom sessions can see what targets each learner is working towards and can encourage each student on how well they are doing. The system is linked to the college electronic individual learning plan system which consequently provides a much more developed and easily understood reference for progress in personal development skills.

The outcomes

The Steering Wheel forms a most useful visual tool for learners. It develops and highlights confidence and self belief and provides supportive evidence for progression.

The wheel highlights areas for improvement and directs learner mentors to things needing development.

Use of the wheel improves student sense of responsibility for their own learning. For example, if a students needs to improve their spelling they are responsible for bringing in their own dictionary.

Some students have been encouraged to remain on their course because once they see how hard they have worked this motivates them.

Students put their steering wheels into their portfolio and take them to interviews for level 2 courses, and this gives interviewers insight into how hard they have worked.

The wheel has formed a useful contribution to high retention and success rates for foundation learning, and also shows the learners journey towards increased personal effectiveness.

The impact

Of 19 students on one course in 2010-11, 95% were retained and 100% achieved. The one student who left early restarted his course the following year following difficulties at home). The level of retention and achievement is anticipated to be maintained or increased in 2011-12.

Over 80% of learners progressed to a further, level 2 course at Easton College.

One student has been awarded a cross college prize: “Best Progress at Level 1” and another student has been awarded “The Easton College Award for Endeavour” in June 2011.

The Steering Wheel has provided much clearer analysis of student progress, and in 2011-12 it has started to be used across the whole faculty.

The lessons learned

The college has discovered the Steering Wheel to be a wonderful way to reflect on individual student progress, and has helped all staff keep each students’ needs and progress in mind.

It is a great visual way of showing progress and therefore enabling positive praise for students.

Students soon realise staff are ‘on their case’, and supporting all aspects of their learning. The Steering Wheel has formed a tangible tool which can be used to discuss progress with student, parents, and team. It provides joined up thinking across different subjects and parts of the course.

The use of a standardised approach to understanding personal skills has been very helpful for students and staff alike. Staff are more aware of individual targets, and support development and assessment against these targets more effectively.

Supporting files

- [An example copy of ‘The Steering Wheel’](#)