

# 4.10 Chichester College

## Achieving excellence through a licence to observe

In 2010 Chichester College decided to refocus the culture of the entire college on teaching and learning. The college was aware of the fact that the previous observation process was ineffective, so rather than 'tinker' with it, it engaged in a wholesale shift to a new, whole organisation model based on well-established principles (including coaching) delivered in a highly structured and systematic way.



The result of this was demonstrably greater consistency of observation grading and quality of feedback and teacher development. There was a determination to make all teaching, learning and assessment outstanding. As part of this focus the professional development department designed a new lesson observation process made up of five modules which formed a Licence to Observe.

1. Changing culture: an introduction to the observation of teaching and learning framework, self-assessment and action planning.
2. Observation of teaching: gathering the evidence, report writing and moderation.
3. Making key judgements: providing feedback based on collected evidence.
4. Feedback using a coaching model: developing oral feedback skills; providing support for teaching that requires improvement or is inadequate.
5. Setting SMART targets and action planning.

All observers were required to train and all modules were mandatory in order to gain the licence. The process includes a quality framework of regular moderation of observation records. All observers take part in these sessions and an action plan is developed to further enhance the learning that has taken place. The Licence to Observe has also been adapted to meet the differing observation needs for:

- initial teacher training (ITT);
- work-based learning, assessor observation;

- learning support observation;
- student tutor observation.

In addition, a unique module was developed for the student executive to become trained observers, resulting in the involvement of students in lesson observation and a powerful learning experience for them.

The impact of the above model has been wide-ranging and profound. The Licence to Observe programme gained the City & Guilds Beacon Award for Professional Development November 2013.

The impact of the above work exceeded the leadership team's highest expectations. It was felt across the whole college and affected up to 16,000 learners with the student survey in July 2014 finding that 95% of learners felt their teaching was good or better, up from 86% in a survey conducted at the start of the programme.

Learners who were trained as members of student executive were enthused by the training, stating that they now recognise the features of outstanding teaching and learning, adding that the experience of observing with experienced observers has increased their confidence and helped them develop other skills suitable for their progression to university or employment.

In March 2014 Ofsted awarded the college a grade 1 for 'overall effectiveness' with contributing grade 1 in all 3 key aspects. Inspectors commented upon the quality of teaching, learning and assessment saying:

“Teaching, learning and assessment are outstanding. Much outstanding teaching in theory and practical lessons, together with a high level of pastoral and academic support, ensures that learners have the best chance of success. Leaders, managers and teachers place learners at the centre of all college activity, with the result that the vast majority of learners make excellent progress and achieve very successfully.”

They also recognised the contribution and excellence of a 'lesson observation system that is mature and highly effective' adding that 'judgments on strengths and areas for improvement are accurate and evaluative'.

They stated that:

“ Teachers make good use of an excellent range of professional development activities aimed at meeting their individual development needs, such as the nationally recognised Licence to Observe.”

Crucially the process has resulted in creating confident and well trained observers who are respected and trusted by those they observe. The observers act as ambassadors to ensure that the new observation process is regarded as a means of supporting all staff to promote better teaching and learning. The training ensures that observation is founded on evidence-based judgments (both in lesson observation documentation, report writing and self-assessment) and this helped inspire confidence by removing any ambiguity associated with impressionistic judgements. It also gave all staff a greater insight into the process of observation.

It was well received internally and this is reflected in the comments of Micky Riddell, the head of sport and public services, who stated that:

“ We now have clearly defined guidelines that instil confidence and understanding in the full process, from initial notification to final debrief and grading. The training supplied for this process was innovative, inspiring and above all fun. Linked to this is the opportunity to consolidate through periodic moderation meetings, looking at and moderating lesson observations from across college. This activity allowed us to question, discuss and agree on various areas within the whole process at regular planned intervals. I have found that it has given me a greater understanding of the reflective process when giving feedback to teachers I have observed, especially when mentoring teachers under training and newcomers to the department and college.”

Teachers from hair and beauty fed back to their head of learning about their current views on being observed:

“ We now find that lesson observation is a shared experience that we take something positive away from. Observers are friendlier and take time to discuss and listen to our thoughts and feelings about the lesson they have seen. The whole process is much more developmental and as we have regular drop-ins as well as our formal observation, having an observer in the classroom is not now such a big deal. We feel it is a much more relaxed experience and no longer something to be anxious about.”

It is important to note that the ‘Licence to Observe’ initiative was not undertaken in isolation but integrated with other cross-organisational TLA improvement activities such as roadshows and ‘show and tell’. Additional modules have been added to support the development of licences in:

- observing learning support effectiveness in the classroom;
- how to assess scholarly activity;
- non-graded, developmental observation.

Perhaps most significantly the ‘Licence to Observe’ was linked to a coaching culture being embedded throughout the college together with leadership, mentoring, teaching, staff feedback and student feedback. This culture fostered a sense of mutual support and mutual enhancement and in Feb 2015 the project was awarded the TES Best Teaching and Learning Initiative.

*Chichester College is an FE college.*