

MidKent FE College

LSIS case study: Regional Coaching Workshop



Coaching is a:

“safe place for people to talk about what their issues are, to try out new things and come back and reflect on them. It offers the opportunity for real change and real development, which going on a training course may not. It’s also flexible, so somebody can come for 40 minutes at a time that’s convenient to them and work on a very personalised agenda, what they need to do, we think it gets their buy-in in terms of change.”

Summary

MidKent College is using coaching in a number of innovative ways to support both staff and students. With a team of 10 trained coaches, and drawing on a wide range of resources, including the LSIS regional coaching workshops, the coaches support teams and individual teachers. However coaching skills are used more widely in the college in areas as diverse as leadership programmes and student target setting through motivational dialogue.

About MidKent College

MidKent College is one of the largest colleges in the UK providing education and training in Kent for more than 100 years. Well respected in the region and with excellent educational and employment links, the college sits within the two selective education authorities of Kent and Medway, based across two main centres in Gillingham and Maidstone. The new Medway Campus boasts some of the best vocational training facilities in the country. The state-of-the-art site houses top-quality workshops and laboratories as well as a large Learning Resource Centre, refectory and social zones. Also, the college through its subsidiary, MKC Training Services Ltd, has gained what is believed to be the largest commercial contract ever to have been won by a further education college and delivers training in construction and engineering at the Royal School of Military Engineering.

Why an LSIS regional coaching workshop?

Vanessa Kent and Ellie Bentley are two of the 10 coaches working across the curriculum in a college-wide programme at MidKent College. Vanessa’s primary role is coaching, alongside some teaching while Ellie lectures in Painting and Decorating and is also an active teacher coach. They describe their reason for attending LSIS’s London Regional Coaching Workshop as:

“really about trying to learn from other people, networking and also looking at the content, which covered various coaching models.”

Vanessa and Ellie attended in the knowledge that they would be facilitating some CPD training for the other internal coaches. They were able to pick up useful models and activities that they could cascade at their own training day. Ellie and Vanessa recommend the workshops:

“As a way of meeting other people and as a way of gaining practical skills.”

The outcomes reported from using coaching

- One of the broader benefits is a marked improvement in observation grades, increasing year on year, particularly for new and sessional members of the College. It is early days to make a definite link but Vanessa is clear that the coaching approach is having an impact.
- The college has a talent development scheme for aspiring managers and coaching is being used as part of the scheme. Ellie is on the scheme and is finding the in-depth coaching a huge resource, using many of the techniques suggested and sharing the practices with the team.
- Coaching is being used as part of a programme running for first line managers.
- Coaching can help people get up to speed very quickly. For example it has been used to develop the confidence of new lecturers and has led, on one occasion, to someone gaining a full-time role much more quickly than usual. The lecturer put this down to having the opportunity to really work and thus develop confidence on the areas they chose.
- Coaching is used to support e-learning, seen as key because technology changes frequently. One to one support is often considered the best way to get teachers up to speed quickly. For example a number of people have recently received coaching on how to use Mouse Mischief – software that allows PowerPoint quizzes to become truly interactive with students being able to vote on the correct answers.
- The College is able to share good ideas from the people being coached, with their permission, and thus get cross fertilisation across the organisation and between faculties.

The activity

“The thing that was really very helpful was trying out the models. We weren’t just told; you get to do it yourself, and share feedback.”

Vanessa

Vanessa and Ellie had an opportunity to try out several techniques at the workshop, including one called “moan, moan, moan.” The coach picks out the positive points as a client shares something that is worrying them which they found useful and simple. They also enjoyed an icebreaker activity using cards with inspiring questions such as:

- “If you suddenly found the courage to do one thing that you have always been afraid of doing, what would you want it to be?”

The College have adapted the cards and made them more colourful and these are available in the College’s resource room for teachers’ “The Inspiration Station”. It is creating a good start to the College’s training sessions.

Vanessa and Ellie also found particularly helpful the introduction of the solutions-focused coaching approach and the OSKAR model. This model, which uses scaling from 1 to 10 to work out where you are, where you want to be, and how to get there in small, manageable steps, has been shared with all the other College coaches. Vanessa has found scaling a particularly useful strategy in both one to one coaching with new tutors and also during tutorials

with students, as a way of focusing on what they are able to do as a starting point to inform where they go next.

The college promotes a culture of coaching seeing motivational dialogue as key to help students' progress. At a recent staff development day they adapted the Wheel of Change to make it more student friendly and to support students who may not be able set their targets immediately until they come to terms with, recognise and deal with any underlying issues. The wheel is used as part of the students' termly tutor reviews to engender better learning conversations. Staff also have access to a set of cards and coaching questions that are linked to GROW (Goal, Reality, Options, Will do) as part of the move to encourage them to take part in supported classroom experiments to develop teaching and learning.



Why LSIS?

The College were able to use the LSIS Accounts scheme for the Regional Coaching Workshop and subsequently for some online training in team coaching which they opened up to the first line managerial team. Ellie and Vanessa also liked the idea of being part of a coaching network, with opportunities to meet with other people and see how things were progressing in their institutions.

Lessons learned

Ellie and Vanessa believe it has been hugely helpful to the development of coaching to have a couple of inspirational senior managers backing the coaches. The SMT understands the issues around Teaching and Learning and have both supported coaching and its embedding within the College culture.