

# Shrewsbury College

## Case study: ACP ILM Level 5



*“The Institution has appreciated and assimilated a different approach to Training and Development. There is a much deeper appreciation of what it means for people to really change and how they can change. Before coaching started staff development was more mechanistic. Now it’s more organic.”*

Coaching has improved the quality of conversations about teaching and learning:

*“Now people engage more in their own learning and this style enables the quality of conversations, and the sharing of stories between different departments. There is now a feeling of there being solutions in the room.”*

### Summary

Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology have put coaching at the centre of their drive to further improve teaching and learning. Through LSIS they have trained 8 Subject Learning Coaches and 2 Advanced Learning Coaches (ALCs). The latest step has been to allow their 2 ALCs, Jane Martin and Sandra Stansfield, to gain the LSIS Advanced Coaching Programme accredited at ILM Level 5. The success of coaching in providing individual staff support, improving satisfaction and performance, has led the college’s leadership team to agree permanent funding. This will pay for LSIS training to maintain current coach numbers and for remission in teaching so coaching can take place. Approaches from the Advanced Coaching Programme have been used widely for learners too, from helping students to set targets, to sharing coaching approaches and benefits at their internal “Share Fair.” They have developed a Moodle site for Coaching, Teaching and Learning.

### About Shrewsbury College

The college has two main campuses in Shrewsbury, one in Telford and three smaller outreach centres, making it Shropshire’s largest FE college. With 2000 full-time and 5000 part time students and 360 staff, the College offers mainly vocational courses from entry level through to higher education and also provides courses for all apprentices on work-based learning programmes. Its mission is “unlocking potential, realising aspiration, achieving success” and the College has the vision to be “first class, first choice”. In its November 2011 OFSTED inspection the inspector highlighted target setting and observation as potential areas to develop. He also noted the positive use of coaching to help improve teaching and learning.

*“The college continues to invest in resources to improve the quality of teaching and learning and staff speak highly of the team of advanced learning coaches and the range of development activity provided.”*

## The Challenge

The College wanted to provide appropriate and flexible support for their staff, whether they were new or highly experienced. They were also keen to do so in a timeframe that fitted around work patterns which could hinder attendance at twilight sessions or other whole group programmes. They were inspired by attending an LSIS information day, excited because they saw coaching as an interactive way to tailor training to the needs of individuals and teams. Donna Lucas, the College's Assistant Principal Human Resource Development explains,

*"It provides a more flexible tailored approach as a way to individualise CPD for our teachers."*

## The outcomes reported from using coaching

- Improved target setting by students
- An improved OFSTED rating for one division
- Improved observation grades
- Changing culture

Following the OFSTED inspector's report a coaching approach was piloted to achieve more effective target setting and improve learning outcomes using the solutions-focus OSKAR model. Through scaling from 1 to 10 the person decides where they are, where they want to be and then draws out the resources to make the shift in small steps. Working with teams in Business Administration and Performing Arts, large numbers were written across a wall and on the floor. Sandra got students to decide on their target, where they were on the scale, and support each other in asking questions about how they would move forwards. Sandra and Jane also demonstrated the OSKAR model to other teachers and the college's PGCE students, including a PGCE student in Sport who subsequently used it with his learners. The feedback from students is hugely positive:

*"I liked the phrase you used - 'anything else?' - It has really stuck with me and I will always remember it."*

*"I liked the way how you showed that setting targets can be a fun thing to do instead of a horrendous nightmare that nobody wants to experience."*

*"I believe that using the new process, I'll be more successful by setting smaller and more realistic goals to reach the next step."*

*"I feel more confident and organised."*

*"...they were clear steps and easy to follow so as well as using for my college work it will be good for targets in life in general."*

The coaches work with staff and teams by request on areas from Equality and Diversity and lesson planning to embedding functional skills. They also helped staff to prepare for Ofsted. The innovative approaches, experimenting and increased confidence generated in some areas, for example in Hospitality and Catering, led to that team participating in the College-wide Sharing Fair, leading a session on learner-centred approaches. And the work with the Hospitality and Catering Programme Team resulted in positive feedback from the Ofsted Inspectors and a Grade 2 for the area overall, an improvement from the previous inspection and mini-inspection where the department had received a Grade 3. Coaching has also demonstrated a clear improvement in lesson observation grades with 80% of those who have

been coached, individually or in groups, increasing their grade. For those who had not received coaching the improvement in grades was just under 7%.

Following Ofsted the College carried out a Needs Analysis; 41% of teachers responding asked to work with a learning coach. Jane says:

*“Whereas before they tended to feel they “had to” attend training, now they can self refer and they are encouraging each other...Managers can now see deliverables too.”*

Results of the needs analysis became part of the post OFSTED inspection action plan, with many improvement actions taken forward by the learning coaches, embedding the strategic use of the team.

Sandra and Jane feel staff buy-in is better due to coaching's flexibility and personalised nature and believes it is helping shift the College's culture. Coaching has become the norm, seen as a proactive option that staff can take to improve their practice rather than as a deficit model. Recently a Grade 1 teacher sought further development through coaching. Afterwards they commented that the facilitative approach had enabled them to go in a direction they'd not thought about before and had gone away with lots of ideas to develop. Jane says:

*“It's their agenda, not ours so they bring to us what they have chosen to work on....(and) they start to explore things that they didn't know about before they came to the session and go away feeling they learned a lot through the support.”*

Sandra and Jane point to the senior management support they have had, describing it as one of the big enablers.

*“Getting Donna's [Assistant Principal] support was key. She's really taken this and run with it, helped guide us and trusted us and our experience. That's enabled us to take things in the direction we wanted to go. Donna's supported us all the way, including meetings with the Principal, and been a real advocate.”*

Sandra and Jane are now both strategic partners on the executive leadership development team too, helping to steer strategic decisions on how to take T&L forward. The Principal's support included launching the Needs Analysis, with coaching now seen as a key aid to ensuring staff satisfaction. Jane:

*“We can't change culture overnight and get instant results, but where we are at now is a good snapshot of the direction we're moving in.”*

## **The activity**

Jane and Sandra embarked on the Advanced Coaching Programme in early 2011 to further support their development as coaches. It has allowed the use of coaching to expand beyond teaching and learning for individuals and teams to supporting development for leaders and managers.

The College had attended a few LSIS events and was struck by the quality of resources and delivery which was tied up so closely with T&L in a very creative way. This matched where they wanted to go with CPD for their staff. Sandra and Jane believe the programme and the tutors were extremely high quality, the programme design very good and well sequenced, and the resources and support, including for assignments and coaching practice, exceptional. Sandra and Jane have now become part of the wider LSIS Advanced Coaching Programme team –

talking about the business impact and the lessons learned to those now training on cohorts of the Advanced Coaching Programme.

Sandra and Jane feel

*“We were challenged in the sessions which were all very different. We always went with high expectations and never came away disappointed.”*

Sandra enjoyed working with people from other environments.

*“It provided a real, fresh perspective on our broader practice. There can be a view education is different. That’s true to some extent, but it made me think that things were transferable between organisations, it gave us fresh ideas. The energy it gave me and way it made me reflect on myself as a person and own my skills had an enormous personal impact. It really energised me, and made me feel I have something new to offer and share with people.”*

Jane describes the programme as:

*“Transformational. It really did open up a different way of interacting and communicating with people and improving practice. It has brought about all sorts of changes, fundamentals: the language I use, my non-verbal signals, the way I approach T&L and 1-2-1 conversations and where my focus is, my presence in a room. I can’t express sufficiently the extent it has changed me....you’re hooked because it’s so effective, because it really works. You can see the impact on the people you are working with, whether 1-2-1 or groups. The most rewarding aspect is that you can see the energy, the buzz that’s created through the interaction and enthusiasm; the excitement about what they are doing may be something they have not felt for a while and there’s this potential they might go on and fulfil for others and for themselves.”*

## **Coaching compared to other change interventions**

Donna believes that having the right team, passionate about coaching, is key to its success, which was commented on in the Ofsted and recent Investors in People inspections. Donna argues that when IiP and OFSTED are saying it is the right approach it also supports the case among the senior management team and is a catalyst to continue. Staff feel a

*“sense of ownership and empowerment because they have taken control over their own professional development. They are not done to, they are seeking it out.”*

## **Lessons learned**

- Senior management buy-in makes a big difference
- Choose the right people to be coaches
- Put coaching at the heart of learning and development
- Make coaching optional