

Reinvigorating Curriculum Design

Case Study



Project title: Developing a strategy for Higher Education development in a Further Education College

North Hertfordshire College (NHC) carried out a series of visits to successful and innovative providers of higher education in the UK and to a European provider in order to inform the strategic planning and development of their own higher education strategy and provision.

Worth reading if you are interested in:

- Higher education in further education centres
- Higher education policy
- Vocational education
- Study skills

Contact information

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Participating organisation(s):

North Hertfordshire College

Visits were undertaken to: New College Durham, Gateshead College, Maastricht University

What the project set out to do and why

At a time of significant change and uncertainty in relation to national higher education (HE) policy and funding, this project was designed to support NHC in developing a strategic plan for HE at the College. The project enabled NHC to inform their local decision-making through the experiences of centres with larger and more established HE provision both within the UK and in Europe.

The specific objectives of the project were to enable NHC to:

- create an affordable and accessible HE portfolio, making decisions about appropriate HE-level programmes to meet current and predicted need;
- enhance their portfolio of HE provision linked to STEM and other key

employability areas;

- explore strategies which will establish employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship at the heart of the NHC HE provision;
- identify appropriate delivery models to increase recruitment;
- develop a marketing strategy to increase recruitment, including that from local schools and through internal progression.

What the project has achieved so far

Staff from the NHC visited 3 providers of higher education: Gateshead College, New College Durham and Maastricht University. The visits were carefully planned and structured through close liaison between colleagues in the different centres. A set of objectives was drawn up for each visit and a programme of meetings arranged with key staff in each centre.

As a result of the project, NHC has made a number of short-term decisions regarding its provision and has a more secure and confident base from which to take forward their long-term strategy for HE development. The College now has plans in the following areas:

Strategic planning

- Expand the range of part-time programmes in light of the new access to student loans, the removal of a cap on part-time numbers and the opportunity afforded to learners to work part-time while studying;
- Develop of a new Leisure Management HND with a core curriculum in year 1 leading to specialist pathways in Sports, Leisure, Public Services and Travel and Tourism in year 2.

Teaching and learning

- Develop staff in designing and leading problem-based learning;
- Introduce the use of formal lecture delivery as part of a total learning experience together with seminars and practical learning projects;
- Introduce a study skills programme;
- Develop opportunities for professional development for staff through partnership with the centres visited during the project.

Marketing

- Take forward a renewed marketing strategy with an emphasis on developing the College's partnerships with local schools and on improving internal progression;
- Celebrate the distinctiveness of the HE learning experience offered by NHC, with particular emphasis on lower cost, localism, employability and flexible delivery.

Employability, entrepreneurship and enterprise

- Innovative examples of industry links and work-related learning often develop from the curriculum teams where they have industry experience and contacts to draw on. Not all curriculum teams have the confidence or the experience of working with employers to design and offer exciting experiences for learners and these may need support and encouragement to do so.

What the project still needs to do

For a variety of reasons, it was not possible to complete a planned visit to the University of Plymouth Colleges, a regional partnership of 18 providers delivering HE in the South West. This visit will take place before the end of the 2012/13 academic year.

The value of the visits for the participating staff has been significant and NHC plans to carry out further visits and to encourage additional staff within the HE faculty to participate.

The project team plan to carry out focus groups to explore the attitudes and aspirations of current students regarding HE and to use this information to further inform marketing and programme development.

Key learning points

- Visits to other providers are an extremely valuable way to inform your own strategic planning because they stimulate thinking and offer models which can then be considered within your own local context. Visits were particularly useful because time was taken to clarify the desired outcomes of each visit and to prepare a structured programme for the visit with opportunities to meet and engage in-depth with colleagues.
- The staff who participated in the visits generated many creative ideas and were motivated to take forward developments. From this experience, the College recommends that a range of staff involved in HE be included in such visits where possible, including senior leaders, programme managers and service staff such as those with responsibility for recruitment, employability etc.
- The context for planning HE remains very volatile and, for this reason, making fixed and long-term decisions about provision may be ill-advised. Instead, colleges need to keep their provision under continuous review, making sure that their decision-making is informed by:
 - engagement with the sector to maintain up-to-date knowledge and understanding of external change factors;
 - accurate and current insights into local learner attitudes and demand;
 - robust monitoring and tracking of application and progression data and trends.