

Steps to Excellence

A Case Study in Improving Vocational Teaching and Learning at Hull College

Introduction

In September 2003, a new post of Teaching & Learning Improvement Manager was created in *Quality Improvement* to foster the conditions needed to improve teaching and learning. The Teacher Education team was transferred to *Quality Improvement* at the same time. Broadly speaking, at that time, the work of the college generally and teaching in particular was considered good but classroom practice and outcomes for students were variable and inconsistent across the vocational areas. The remit of the post was broad and initially 5 key priorities were established:

- To raise standards by supporting new teachers who frequently came directly from the work place into the classroom
- To raise standards by supporting colleagues with teaching observations deemed unsatisfactory
- To promote greater consistency of practice in the judgement of student work and assessment for learning practice
- To develop the role of the Teacher Education team in raising standards
- To develop valued processes and structures to deliver the above

In the subsequent nine years, much work has been done to develop and to consolidate good practice in vocational Teaching and Learning. A robust framework has emerged which fosters the sharing of best practice in dual professionalism. The philosophy which underpins the working practices is one of support, coaching and the kind of reflective practice which ensures continued development of teaching skills and techniques. This model has proved to be highly effective in developing confidence and nurturing a culture of creativity and moderate risk taking. A robust moderated observation process remains one of the key measures to make informed judgements about the standard of our work. This is underpinned however by a respectful, supportive experimental model of continuous professional development. Moderation by external

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colleagues from local authority and from partner colleges as well as regular training ensures high standards.

The initial 5 priorities have grown to include support for ILT and for developing Restorative Practice in managing student behaviour positively and other colleagues have been drawn into delivering the continuous professional development framework in order to promote a coaching ethos and promote reflective practice among vocational staff and students alike.

Support for new teachers

In a large General Further Education College, the vast majority of new staff arrive with no prior experience of teaching. A probationary process has been established for all new teachers at Hull College Group both full and part time. This involves an initial Survival Skills session for those who have little or no classroom experience. This short session provides an opportunity to meet the Teaching and e- Learning Improvement manager and to gain some introductory skills for classroom or work-based practice. A ten month probationary period involves 2 observations. The first of these is conducted by the Teaching & e- Learning Improvement Manager to provide clear guidance and targets support for improvement. The second observation, conducted by the Quality Improvement and Student Support Manager (QulSSM), means that there is subject specialist direction offered. This observation feeds into the OTL (observation of Teaching and Learning) profile for the school. Re-observations support those who are struggling to improve their skills.

The College has an excellent track record for supporting the acquisition of professional qualifications and all unqualified teachers progress initially to PTTLS and ultimately to Cert ED /PGCE. The members of this team are all considered excellent teachers and were appointed specifically for their record in outstanding teaching and course leadership. They have subsequently developed their own academic qualifications to support their role. The profile of teacher trainers at Hull College is at variance with the sector as a whole, drawing as it does from vocational as well as academic backgrounds .

Impact evaluation tells us that our probationary teachers have valued the Survival Skills, the support from their managers and coaches, observations and in particular, their teacher training as developing their skills as supporting their progress as teachers. Probationary teachers go on in their second year of teaching to outperform the College average in good and outstanding teaching at 90 %

Support for teachers with *satisfactory (Requires Improvement)* and *unsatisfactory* teaching grades

If staff are given an inadequate grade during OTL, the teacher is referred to the T&-eLearning manager. Support and coaching is given until the teacher is ready to be re-observed. This support may continue after the re-observation if needed but the teacher is not “signed off” until they have achieved at least a satisfactory observation. This supportive process has proved its worth. In a recent external review in March 2012, twelve of the observations conducted were of staff previously found unsatisfactory who had received coaching. Of these twelve, an independent inspector found 10 of them “Good”, one of them to be “Outstanding” and one to be “Satisfactory”.

Staff who have been given a satisfactory grading are supported by their QuISSM in the school. We are currently reviewing the process for support for staff that have had a repeat satisfactory grade and look to extending the coaching approach to include a joint planning approach.

Promoting consistency to achieve better Teaching and Learning

The College group is working to a Strategy for Teaching and Learning and Quality Improvement which is reviewed annually. At the heart of the strategy is the promotion of creative, innovative strategies based around the LSIS Ten Pedagogies. The Strategy is the responsibility of the Teaching and Learning Committee which reports into Governors. The Committee is highly active in its procedure and importantly the membership cuts a slice through the organisation, allowing active contributions from coaches, teaching staff, QuISSMs as well as Senior Leadership. This ensures a very strong ownership by the Committee of the targets of the strategy but also builds in an active solutions and ideas

for dissemination. It creates, steers and validates the approaches to improvement in Teaching & Learning.

When the role of T&LM was established there was an opportunity to gain a more consistent overview of strengths and areas for development across the College in Teaching, Learning and Assessment practice as we worked on an Internal Observation Process which mirrored an Ofsted visit. These ensured that the schools were reviewed every 18 months. However not all staff were observed as part of this process and subsequently the College has moved to a model of a yearly observation for all staff and these take place across the year. There is now a “risk based” structure called the Health Check SPA which means that schools which require improvement are subject to a full school SPA (School Performance Assessment) including a full review of teaching learning assessment and success rates. High performing schools are reviewed using a desk top review of success rates. There is confidential access to a data base of observation grades and this facilitates the management of standards.

The quality of assessment for learning practice is reviewed as part of a formal school SPA. Work Scrutiny will form part of our Learning Walks for the first time this academic year.

Structures have developed over time to support consistency with the establishment of the role of Quality Managers (QuISSMs) in each school who meet fortnightly to share problems and to work together towards common goals of improving student success, student support and Teaching and Learning.

The Ten Points series has been developed to support teachers in understanding the minimum standards required for their performance. These cover a range of all teaching, learning and assessment activities but for vocational learning there has been a focus on Modelling as a key pedagogy for improving the acquisition of vocational skills.

Learning Walks have been added recently to the mechanisms we have in place for ensuring continuous improvement in teaching and learning. This development has allowed managers to try to catch staff doing something right. The walks have been thematic and set in particular

weeks so that we can identify hotspots as well as areas where there is best practice and use this to help each other.

The Role of the Teacher Education and other CPD training structures in supporting excellence in vocational learning

The Teacher Education team has grown to accommodate the growing need for new staff at the College but also within the region. Mixed classes of external and internal trainees ensure that there is ample opportunity to share the best practice. The staff have been selected for their recognised skills in vocational teaching themselves and they model best active learning in the classroom based teaching. The staff teaching on these programmes are also trained active members of the College's OTL team and there is a healthy moderation taking place between colleagues in the dual roles. The back ground of the staff ensures that they can draw clear links between the theoretical learning and vocational teaching practice. This team is also used to deliver some of our internal staff development programmes such as Improving Question & Answer and Behaviour Management support and Restorative Practice. These sessions have been very well received by the staff undertaking them.

All staff have access to 7 days' staff development per year. Vocational staff are expected to undertake Industrial Updating.

Coaching and a Community of Outstanding Practice

Coaching has become a foundation stone of teaching and learning improvement in the last 5 years. A decision was taken to train a network of Teaching and Learning coaches led by T&LM and a team of Advanced Coaches. The College has adopted the LSIS Coaching model and there are monthly meetings to share and transfer good practice and new ideas. Regular meetings are key to maintaining momentum in this respect and the coaches have described this opportunity for mixing with colleagues from across vocational areas as one of the main drivers for change.

The coaches have undertaken a number of Action Research Projects as part of their training, some of which has proved highly effective and very original. A good example of this is the Film project. Joinery staff began by filming practical task for use by students on the Virtual Learning

Environment. This developed further when the films were used in classroom sessions to embed and illustrate theoretical learning and support the delivery of Functional Skills and Customer Service. Students then began to download these onto their own SMART phones to review learning prior to starting a practical task. The staff began to use QR codes on equipment for fast access onto the VLE. Students began to use film themselves to review their own practical skills and this led to a development of the students' reflective skills. This particular project has been awarded an LSIS Good Practice award. The practice has now spread to Electrical Engineering and to Motor Vehicle

The model of cross curricular work has been extended to bringing together a group of Band B lecturers to promote Digital Literacy. Opportunities have been created for the sharing and support between coaches and Band B staff and this has created a further synergy. The College has an E-learning team who provide training and support for staff. Recent work has been done to facilitate this work and the fruit has been Small Change- Big difference- a training model offered across the academic year. The e-learning team now input regularly into the monthly meetings of coaches and Band Bs and this has ensured greater visibility for this training and better support for all involved in delivering Staff CPD. There has been a 14% point increase in staff satisfaction with the delivery of the e-learning training.

The College has been keen to bid for projects from LSIS and from JISC to support opportunities to experiment in Teaching and Learning. The result of fostering a little risk-taking, creativity and encouraging staff to reflect on their skills and be frank about their needs has led to a major improvement in the Teaching and Learning profile which last year finished on 87%.

Last year the College was successful in achieving a Beacon Award for Teaching and Learning of which we are extremely proud.

Val Maybury

Teaching and e-learning Manager