

## Sharing good practice within your organisation: Home-grown functional skills 'top tips' training

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Brooklands College

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### Summary

Part way through the delivery of a project to share and transfer good practice in English and maths, we believe we have developed some straightforward resources and approaches which others could use, as we are doing, in the pursuit of higher standards. Early outcomes for our College include the development of two new training modules based on practical home-grown 'top tips' for embedding functional English and maths at all levels. So far the delivery of this training has resulted in an increase of 30 per cent confidence amongst our central delivery team. We expect to see similar outcomes across College by Easter 2013, with the overall aim to positively impact success rates for our learners now and in the future.

### Introduction

#### About Brooklands College

Brooklands College is a large FE college operating from two main sites in Surrey and Middlesex. We offer courses from Entry to higher education. This includes a broad range of vocational and A-Level provision, as well as part-time supported learning, and English and maths skills provision from community and workplace venues.

In terms of English and maths, we deliver a range of qualifications including GCSE and functional skills both as a standalone qualification and as part of the Apprenticeship framework. Recently we have fast tracked our Apprenticeship programme, with five new pathways and more in development. Our aim is to be, 'Outstanding Every Day' in every aspect of our work.

#### What we wanted to achieve

We had been developing English and maths provision for a number of years. This had resulted in improved whole organisation approaches and a readiness for change, alongside some pockets of very good practice. However, we still had some areas of underperformance in English and maths which we wanted to tackle proactively alongside continuous improvement across the board. We decided to take a project-based approach to development, building on the very best practice from within the organisation, whilst utilising external resource and support from the LSIS English, maths and ESOL support programme. We are part way through this project.

Our overall aim is: **To improve success rates in functional skills and GCSE English and maths across College**

**Our intended outcomes are to:**

- develop our Teaching and Learning Mentors as a central team who can offer English/maths support and share good practice across the College;
- produce/source a bank of English and maths resources which are user-friendly and accessible for all;
- develop a space on the virtual learning environment (VLE) as a structure within which resources can develop organically, capturing and sharing emerging good practice;
- develop and deliver generic and targeted CPD to identified departments; and
- measure and evaluate the impact of the project, making recommendations for future associated strategies and practices.

## Implementation

We began by writing a project outline and delivery plan which was presented to senior managers to initiate the project. In addition to aims and objectives, this document detailed project costs, timeframes, project team structure, monitoring, reporting, evaluation and risk management. It described how we would split the project into clear stages of delivery as follows.

- Stage 1: Audit resource, identify risk and plan project, December 2012.
- Stage 2: Develop team and resource; commence support, January – March 2013.
- Stage 3: Further support delivery and resource development, April – June 2013.
- Stage 4: Evaluation and impact measurement, July 2013.

Our core project team structure included the following members.

- Quality Impact Manager, Nicki Adams - Project Assurance.
- Head of Department Skills for Life, Lorraine Crossland - Project Manager.
- Teaching and Learning Mentors (TLMs) - Project Delivery Team.
- LSIS Associate, Sara Whalley - Project Advisor.

The decision to utilise the team of Teaching and Learning Mentors to deliver this project was logical as their core function is already to support improvement in teaching and learning across the College. They are all in that role as they are expert practitioners. Even though, within this team, confidence levels for supporting colleagues specifically with facilitating learning in English and maths was variable. They did, however, all have tried and tested ideas and access to best practice. This was our starting point.

## What we did

Stage one audit results were illuminating and provided us with a clear baseline measure and reassurance of the need for this project. We used an online survey to ask teaching staff a number of questions about their practice, knowledge and confidence in English and maths. Headline outcomes revealed that confidence levels for embedding and supporting our learners with maths were 4.88 out of 10, and 3.66 out of 10 for English. We were firstly surprised that both were exceptionally low and secondly that English was even lower than maths. However, we were very encouraged that the survey also revealed a great willingness to learn and develop.

Soon after this survey, the team received training requests from staff in one section, specifically for 'top tips.' One Teaching and Learning Mentor responded quickly, putting together some top tips of her own for English and delivered an initial training session. The response to this straightforward approach was extremely positive and it got us thinking – **what if we put the notion of 'top tips' at the centre of our model for improvement. Could this be the approach we have been looking for?** So we did exactly that.

Stage two of the project has so far focused on the development of a 'Top Ten Tips' sheet for both English and maths, and an accompanying 90 minute training module for each. In terms of development and capacity building to deliver this training, we took the following steps.

- Met with the Teaching and Learning Mentors and asked them to reflect on their practice, and the best practice of others, in order to come up with a definitive list of top tips for both English and maths.
- Worked with our LSIS Associate to amalgamate these tips into just ten for each, ensuring that the tips covered aspects of embedding and functionality, could be applied to any subject at any level, and were written clearly with examples on one side of A4.
- Our LSIS Associate then used the agreed 'Top Ten Tips' to draft two accompanying 90 minute training plans which our Teaching and Learning Mentors would use to deliver 'Top Tips Training' to targeted departments across College. The training plans utilised existing LSIS CPD resources from the Excellence Gateway, as well as newly constructed activities and references to other online teaching and learning resources.
- Our LSIS Associate delivered the training to Teaching and Learning Mentors as a Train the Trainer session, delivering the session as staff would need to but asking for critique, suggested changes and alternative activity ideas along the way.
- The final version of the training was agreed and sent to the team ready for delivery during the spring staff development day.

Alongside the developments above, the team have audited our VLE for opportunities to develop and embed English and maths resources, including a top tips section and the use of 'Top Tips Guides' for which we have developed a pro forma. These guides will showcase specific tips, resources and activities in more detail and will be clearly assigned to the member of staff submitting them. Managed by Teaching and Learning Mentors, this is a structure by which good practice ideas can be shared now and in the future across College, and provides opportunities for subject-specific tip sharing.

## Outcomes and impacts

### What we have achieved so far

The Maths Top Tips training session resulted in the following outcomes for our Teaching and Learning Mentors.

- Thirty per cent increase in confidence, knowledge and understanding related to their own ideas and approaches for embedding and facilitating maths learning in their area of the curriculum.
- Thirty-two per cent increase in confidence, knowledge and understanding related to their ability to deliver the Top Ten Tips training in maths to colleagues across College.

Comments from the Teaching and Learning Mentors were very encouraging.

“I’m excited by the prospect of delivering this training and feel that teachers will come up with some really good ideas for embedding maths in their subject areas.”

Julie Collingwood, Teaching and Learning Mentor

“I hope this will impact the team as it has me, to believe in themselves of their natural abilities to support their learners in extending their own understanding of maths.”

Debra Hunt, Teaching and Learning Mentor

We are delivering the English Train the Trainer programme shortly.

### **What we have learned so far**

We are finding that working within a project structure is helping us to break developments into clear steps with structured points for reflection and evaluation. The process is forcing us to focus on a collective vision, to think about tangible impact and to appreciate the worth of the project and the ideas of the people within it.

Teaching and Learning Mentors responded positively to asking them to generate the top tips themselves. This has created a real sense of ownership of the project. We hope that the Top Tip Guides which provide wider staff teams with the opportunity to contribute their ideas, via the VLE will have a similar impact in driving continuous improvement from the front line.

One of our practical challenges was identifying tips which could be used within any subject and at any level. Teaching and Learning Mentors initially had lots of subject specific tips, but we learnt that the knack was to spot the recurring themes and generic approaches which could be applied across the board. Essentially we were looking for tips which were both good practice and highly transferable.

### **Key lessons learned**

Our mantra for this work has been twofold, and so far this has been central to its success.

- Capitalise on what already works well, identify core themes (tips) amongst staff and ensure these ideas are attributed to them.
- Keep it simple: training and resources should be straightforward and accessible for all. We recognise this as a key factor in motivating real change and improvement for specialists and non-specialists alike.

### **What we are taking forward**

In addition to VLE developments, our next steps are to deliver the English Train the Trainer programme and then roll out the Top Tips Training to targeted departments. Initially, impact will be measured through changes in staff confidence, but then in an ongoing manner through standard systems such as lesson observation data and success rates. Plans to take forward post-project will be embedded within our quality improvement plans. We are also in the process of tweaking the training so that it can be easily delivered to NVQ assessors. We believe that these tips are relevant to work-based learning delivery.

We really hope that these tips, the training and support will bring people in from the cold, to an environment where they feel safe to ask questions and realise they have good practice to share,

and that this will result in achieving our aim to improve outcomes for learners in English and maths.

### What advice we would give to others

We believe that the Top Ten Tips sheet and training plans are 'ready to go' resources, which could be made relevant to any organisation delivering English or maths. The training itself follows the top ten tips and stops at various tips to try related activities and examine resources. The activities and resources could easily be changed to amplify the tips you feel are most relevant to your organisation.

We feel though, that for maximum impact, it is worth developing your own set of tips if you have capacity and expertise in house, to encourage ownership and celebrate your own good practice.

Advice we would offer to others developing their own 'top tips' for English and maths would be:

- communicate a clear vision and purpose for the work;
- invest in time at the beginning of the process to identify the best ideas and resources amongst your team;
- ensure your 'top tips' apply to teaching at all levels and from any learning perspective, for example the range of subject/vocational areas in your organisation;
- ensure your top tips include approaches which support functionality, such as a focus on teaching process skills and applying learning in both familiar and unfamiliar contexts;
- be really strict with yourself about keeping the tips to ten for English and ten for maths only – short, sharp and focused;
- try to write the top tips in plain English, using examples and resources to illustrate each; and
- present your top tips on one side of A4 – this is not only a digestible format, but also practical for staff to take away and keep/display on a notice board.

### Further reading

When writing our training modules we integrated a number of CPD module resources from the English, maths and ESOL hub on the [Excellence Gateway](#). The modules are of really good quality with clear guidance for trainers. You can access our Top Ten Tips for English and Maths, and the accompanying training modules for use in your organisations from the English, maths and ESOL hub on the [Excellence Gateway](#).

### Contact information

**Date published:** June 2013

**Provider name:** Brooklands College

**Sector coverage:** The generic nature of this case study makes it relevant for any organisation delivering learning in functional English or maths. This includes sixth form or further education (FE) Colleges, adult and community learning, prison or probation service, or providers delivering work based learning.

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