

# CASE STUDY: WEST HERTS COLLEGE

JOY WILLIAMS – OCTOBER 2017



## Background

West Herts College is a general Further Education (FE) college with three campuses in Hertfordshire; Watford, Hemel Hempstead and Kings Langley. Their students come from a 30-mile radius, meaning their intake is diverse. There are 4,000 FE students aged 16-18, as well as an additional 3,500-4,000 part-time/adult and Higher Education students.

## Understanding the role of advanced practitioners

At West Herts College advanced practitioner-type staff are called Teaching and Learning Leaders (TLLs). There are currently 10 TLLs at the college and most operate within their own curriculum area, although some operate cross-college. The roles are permanent positions within the college, and to be successful in the application for a TLL role, practitioners must be outstanding teachers working at a high level. This helps TLLs to gain the respect of other colleagues.

The role has evolved over time. Staff talked about how the focus of the role was originally about being a 'critical friend' and about coaching colleagues, and then it was used to be a conduit for messages from the Senior Management Team. Staff now report that in addition to college-wide responsibilities, TLLs look after the training and development needs of the areas for which they are responsible, which has made the role more practical and has resulted in changes to teaching standards.



Traditionally the role was about mentoring and coaching; now it's about pushing teaching and learning into the high standards, it can be whole team approach.

### Teaching and Learning Leader

Some TLLs operate cross-college meaning that they offer support to departments other than their own. This has been generally well-received by staff.



We're quite controversial in terms of our across college placing, but I think that strengthens that really. Where we've got strong practitioners who know teaching, learning and assessment, those things are the same throughout any curriculum area.

### Senior Manager

Strategies are the same; it's the same with a TLL from a different department. It gives a new perspective on things. It's easy to get bogged down in your respective subject; someone from a different department can give a new approach to their teaching.

### Tutor

TLLs have dedicated time for the role away from teaching (four hours every Tuesday morning) and receive a responsibility allowance for the role. However, other benefits were also mentioned: embedding the good practice they see into their own teaching practice, the satisfaction of

developing others, being exposed to new ideas and increased job satisfaction.

There are one or two TLLs per school depending on the size of the student cohort and number of teaching staff to support. Heads of School are responsible for quality within their own area and are supported by the TLLs. The TLLs can tailor the messages from the Senior Management Team and offer bespoke training to help different departments implement change. Further, TLLs have access to management information data so they can check that departmental strategies are working to support students. Along with the Head of School they can then implement measures to support staff if intervention is needed. TLLs see their role as *'driving teaching and learning strategies'* across the college.

The TLLs meet together weekly to identify common themes across the college and provide each other with support and practical advice. The meetings also serve as a way for the TLLs to work towards the college improvement plan.

## Activities

There are many activities that the TLLs undertake as part of their role, some are based at an individual level – supporting particular teachers, others support the development of a whole department and some activities are undertaken to support Heads of School. In addition to the activities listed below, some TLLs have also been involved in interviewing for new staff.

- **Quality Assurance Inspections.** There are two quality assurance inspections carried out per year, one between September to December and one around Easter. The activities that the TLL team undertake both form part of this inspection and follow on from the actions identified in the report. The first period of activity includes a round of observations. This is done by heads of school, coordinators and TLLs. Following this, the quality team look for common themes where they can drive improvements and create a Quality Improvement Plan. This plan incorporates feedback from learners and audits of paperwork. It also highlights areas of strength that could be developed even more. A second round of observations and a further internal inspection is conducted later in the year by the quality team to measure the impact of actions taken.
- **Observations.** TLLs are trained to be observers and to use the Common Inspection Framework. They are starting to move away from formal observations and to move towards more thematic walks as this is reflective of Ofsted inspection methods. This approach ensures that all staff have at least one observation per year.
- **Thematic learning walks.** These are short informal observations looking to gather feedback on a particular topic. Thematic walks tend to be used earlier on in the year to look at general themes such as behaviour management.



You can identify things that we may not have seen or heard. Doing thematic walks you can see what their skills are and what they can bring to a team. We have staff that have been here for 15 years, they have fab background knowledge, but new teachers coming in have a fab toolbox that we can use in our meetings to support me, with ideas that I haven't had. You do need new ideas and thematic walks help with that in a quick manner.

## Teaching and Learning Leader

- **Snapshots.** These are very similar to thematic walks in that they are short observations. They tend to be longer than a thematic walk and are used to see whether the support that has been delivered has been implemented and is having an impact. Snapshots give detailed developmental feedback.
- **Corridor Walks.** Informal observations that look particularly at behaviour management; things that can be observed by walking down the corridor, talking to students and observing their behaviour or by looking through windows into classrooms from outside and therefore not disturbing the lesson.
- **Bespoke training.** Training on a particular topic area will be cascaded to departments through bespoke training. For example, when looking at assessment feedback, each department will use different awarding bodies and so need the training contextualised for their own qualifications. With agreement from the Head of School, TLL-led training sessions can be made mandatory for staff to attend.
- **Meetings with staff.** TLLs have time set aside each week for the role and can use this to set up meetings with relevant colleagues that they are supporting. Individuals who are supported are identified either as being new to the college or have been identified in a Quality Improvement Plan as needing guidance. In addition to supporting specific colleagues, they also support all other members of that team. Some TLLs and the teams they support prefer to operate a drop-in system where the TLL has an 'open door' policy so that they are available to respond to ad-hoc enquiries.
- **Focus groups.** Staff or student focus groups can be moderated by TLLs. This could help to capture 'learner voice' or gather information about a particular concern that the Head of School might have about progress.
- **Audits.** The TLLs carry out an audit of departmental paperwork throughout the year; this includes looking at schemes of work, assessment schedules and strategies to achieve.
- **Good practice mentors.** The work of the TLLs is supported by mentors. TLLs identify peer mentors that can spend more time with colleagues. Mentors work with colleagues for around six months looking to improve particular areas of practice. They are often used to demonstrate best practice. Outstanding staff can also be pushed to develop their skills by supporting their colleagues.



You might do a snap shot observation, identify a member of staff that they can sit in with that's great at doing that, learn some best practice. Not all about us training them up, it's about getting other members of staff involved.

### Teaching and Learning Leader

Those staff who are outstanding already and at that level where how much more can I push this member of staff to be fantastic, utilise them to develop other people, act as mentor, deliver training on skills they are particularly strong in.

### Teaching and Learning Leader

## Capability

Staff that undertake observations have to be trained and are required to conduct two dual observations in order to ensure that they are looking for the right things and providing consistent

feedback.

TLLs are able to take qualifications to support them in their role, for example a coaching and mentoring qualification and leadership and management. The TLLs appreciate being given the opportunity to develop their understanding of the theory underlying their roles, as well as practical learning opportunities such as dual observations with an Ofsted inspector.

## Outcomes

There are three main quality drivers in the college currently:

- improving English and maths
- improving value added
- improving attendance.

The quality team look to measure impact through predictive grades, attendance, punctuality, and behaviour within the classroom.



The TLLs' contribution to improving value added, and how they've done that bespoke within their curriculum area, will reap huge benefits from this academic year, across the college... I think that's worked really successfully this year, that bespoke approach to their departments really.

### Senior Manager

The team shared an example of a department that had received bespoke training from a TLL on value added. The training that the TLL devised proposed different methods for contributing towards value added, such as stretch and challenge and effective questioning approaches. Looking at the data subsequent to the training, there was an increase in higher grades being achieved. Not only is training made bespoke, impact measures are individual to that department or school.

## Shared learning

The TLLs have been able to contextualise the messages coming from senior management and offer bespoke training to the departments and schools to make sure messages are understood and implemented.



TLLs have really focused this year on giving a purpose and a value to everything they're then doing. Messages are communicated - there's a reason why it will impact your learners or what it will mean for the tutors. Without that and without the examples within their area there is limited impact, it's just another message with little meaning.

### Senior Manager

Be as transparent with your information as possible; it gives us huge strengths within departments and as a college where we share good practice. We're not too afraid to ask, where this isn't working, "what can I do, how are we delivering the message?"... Share resources, share training, this is what we've delivered to our team, feel free to take it and change it.

### Senior Manager



### Top tips for other providers

- Using outstanding teachers who are seen to work at a high level ensures that those in the advanced practitioner role gain and maintain the respect of colleagues.
- Focusing on training and development, rather than just being 'critical friends' to colleagues, means the advanced practitioner role can be more practical.
- Providing bespoke training enables advanced practitioners to target the areas or issues which would be most beneficial for improvement.
- Encourage a cross-college approach in which colleagues work collaboratively to not only develop departmental needs but to drive college-wide improvements.