

# CASE STUDY: NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE COLLEGE

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## Background

North Hertfordshire College is based on three main campuses located in Hitchin and Stevenage and supports over 2,000 full-time students. The college offers vocational education, apprenticeship and traineeship provision, adult learning, and higher education programmes. The most recent Ofsted report (2017) found that North Hertfordshire College 'good' (2) with traineeships and high needs funded learning judged to be 'outstanding' (1).

## Understanding the role of advanced practitioners

At North Hertfordshire College some advanced practitioners are asked to participate in a Learning Improvement Facilitator programme to support colleagues' development. The college introduced the Learning Improvement Facilitator Programme in 2015 as part of a wider programme of curriculum quality improvement activities.



The purpose of the LIF role is to develop and support the improvement of the teaching and learning across the college.

### Senior Manager

Critically, Learning Improvement Facilitators (LIFs) do not undertake formal observations, and view their role as supporting student outcomes through a peer support mechanism. The college has additionally moved away from graded observations this year.



I think I see it as a role where we are supporting colleagues. So we're coming in as their peers and not as management, and it's sharing our experiences and our knowledge, perhaps of the processes within the college, especially to new members of staff as well.

### Learning Improvement Facilitator

North Hertfordshire College has three full-time Learning Improvement Facilitators who are recruited and managed by the Head of Teaching and Learning. They are located at each campus and work closely with staff teams and individuals. While a LIF's subject specialism is not viewed to be of particular importance by senior managers, LIFs or tutors, some tutors did recognise the value of being matched with a LIF who worked in a curriculum area with a similar style of course delivery, for example, a more practical/vocational subject area.



Access is very intense, actually, from everything else I've taught before, and I think having someone who actually understood that was quite good.

### Tutor

## Activities

Learning Improvement Facilitators have a number of different roles, which can be broadly categorised as:

- Coaching and supporting staff that consistently deliver good teaching, learning and assessment to move to outstanding.
- Supporting staff or areas where teaching and learning is not at the required standard.
- Providing a mentoring programme for new staff as part of the wider induction programme.
- Delivering bespoke training and support to staff teams.
- Uploading resources and training materials to the college intranet.

Firstly, staff can access a bespoke, six-week support programme to develop outstanding practice in their area. This programme involves a learning cycle: developmental observations, joint reflection and feedback, and working together to develop a series of actions which are monitored in future observations. No formal sign-off observation is required and the programme can be extended as required.



My LIF mentor helped me to develop strategies and there were times when she would give me support materials... so, particularly on the activity design, we'd brainstorm ideas and then I would go through them in the class and then feedback how well it worked the week after, and we'd discuss ways to help improve that.

### Tutor

Secondly, Learning Improvement Facilitators have a key role in supporting staff who are struggling to meet the standards expected. Staff can access a bespoke, eight-week support programme to move to good. Typically it involves setting out objectives and milestones for improvement, developmental observations, feedback sessions, signposting to resources, research and guidance, two-week updates to line managers, and a sign-off observation at the end of the eight-week period. The programme can be extended by four weeks if sufficient improvement has not been made. However, if a tutor's professional practice does not show signs of improvement by the end of the 12-week support programme, the Head of Teaching and Learning will review their case and escalate appropriate information to the tutor's line manager (this provides the link to performance management).



A LIF worked with her on, not just a generic list, but really specific things, and what we really focused on this year is recognising people's strengths. So, when we do the LIF programme and we do the observations, we don't just focus on, "This is what you need to do to get better". We actually talk about the strengths that these people have and give them the confidence in the big things that they are really good at, and then work on the others.

### Senior Manager

Thirdly, Learning Improvement Facilitators provide an eight-week mentoring programme for new staff. Typically, it involves coaching on teaching, learning and assessment, college practices and processes, developmental observations and a sign-off observation at the end of the eight-week period. The programme can be extended by four weeks if the required standard is not met.



I thought it was brilliant. I thought the LIF programme was really good. I would certainly recommend it to any new member of staff. You know, I would say, “Do this”, because it’s really good.

#### **Tutor**

Finally, Learning Improvement Facilitators deliver training on a bi-weekly basis to curriculum teams, for example, critical thinking and differentiation. Learning Improvement Facilitators additionally organise team planning and teaching sessions, peer observations, coaching observations, one-to-one coaching, group development sessions and best practice case studies. Staff can also access informal support as and when this is required.



We’ve had a fair number of staff this year who have self-referred, which we’ve not had in previous years.

People learn and develop in different ways, and some people might really benefit from going to watch somebody else teach. They might benefit more from team teaching... It can really vary from person to person.

#### **Senior Manager**

So, it’s a really varied role, and you don’t have the same... With each member of staff, it’s not a rigid process that they have to go through.

#### **Learning Improvement Facilitator**

### **Capability**

LIFs receive training which includes role-playing activities, observation training, observation reviews, and joint observations. They have bi-weekly one-to-one sessions or catch-ups (face-to-face or by telephone) with the Head of Teaching and Learning to discuss individual staff progress and any issues, and are encouraged to apply for external development opportunities such as conferences. These opportunities are funded through the central staff development budget.



We look at every single person I’m supporting: where I feel they’re at; what I need to do to get them moving forward. I have to report in writing at the end of every calendar month to say how I feel they’re getting on and any problems.

#### **Learning Improvement Facilitator**

LIFs support each other informally through sharing best practice, specialist knowledge and skills, and undertaking joint observations. There was recognition from the college that high quality peer support is extremely valuable but time intensive for both LIFs and tutors. Consequently, the college has moved from employing four part-time LIFs last year, to three full-time LIFs this year, to increase capacity through greater timetable remittance.



It’s been really eye-opening, because you’re going into somebody’s classroom and you’re able to see things and you are able to then reflect on it in your own teaching.

#### **Learning Improvement Facilitator**

## Outcomes



It makes my classes more fun actually. It makes them more engaging, and it actually... It probably makes them more consistent, so that I'm not thinking, "Oh, Ofsted's here next week. I've got to make sure I'm embedding maths and English". Now I'm trying to do that in all my lessons consistently.

There's a big checklist on a scale of one to ten for how competent I felt on all of these different activities. So we rated it at the beginning, then we rated it at the middle of the LIF programme, and then we did it at the end, and we looked at how my competence on certain things had improved.

**Tutor**



### Benefits of Learning Improvement Facilitators

- Learners are more engaged, student attendance has improved and classroom behaviour is better.
- Staff retention has improved.
- Formal observation outcomes have improved following LIF support.
- Tutors feel more confident in the classroom as a result of receiving support and can track their development across the course of the programme, which also encourages greater confidence that they are making progress:



When it comes to things like those formal observations, it does make me more confident, actually.

**Tutor**



- There is easier access to teaching resources which encourages experimentation.

## Shared learning



I think what I would say is make sure it's supportive. Make sure people are aware that they're being supported and not being punished by being on this programme.

### Learning Improvement Facilitator

The LIF people that are interviewed and are successful... It is on their approach, their emotional intelligence, how they are as a person - not just a good teacher - and then assigning them to the right person as well.

**Senior Manager**



### Top tips for other providers

- Ensure that the role is supportive and not perceived as a punishment by tutors.
- Allocate an appropriate timetable remittance which matches the level of need in the provider.
- Encourage bespoke one-to-one support which meets tutors' individual needs.



You've got the standard session and training, but I think just having that real bespoke support... I think that's what's important, and you can ask the questions that you'd be a bit too scared to in a group setting.

### Senior Manager



- Encourage a collaborative mentoring relationship between tutors and advanced practitioners - rather than a tutor being told what to do.
- Pick the right people – emotional intelligence and the ability to build collaborative relationships is important.