

CASE STUDY: BARNESLEY COLLEGE

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Background

Barnsley College is an 'outstanding' (1) (Ofsted, 2010) large tertiary college serving Barnsley and surrounding areas in South Yorkshire. The college has around 8,000 students and offers vocational education, A-level programmes, access to higher education, adult and part-time enrolment, apprenticeships and other work-based learning courses.

Understanding the role of advanced practitioners

At Barnsley College, advanced practitioner-type staff are called Advanced Practitioners (APs) and Information Learning Technology Stars (ILT Stars). There is a strong emphasis on:

- supporting and developing staff to improve planning, preparation, curriculum delivery and teaching expertise to ensure that teaching and learning is consistently good or better (APs)
- promoting the creative use of information learning technology in the curriculum and developing interactive learning resources that engage learners in independent study (ILT Stars).



It means to me somebody who is pretty much consistently an outstanding teacher, and additionally has the desire, the skills, and the temperament to coach and mentor other people... I think there's two sides to it, there's your practice and there's your ability to support other people to improve as well... that two-pronged approach, and I think you can be an outstanding practitioner, but you don't necessarily have the skills to support other people. One doesn't mean you've got the other and I think that's important.

Senior Manager

Barnsley College emphasises the importance of firmly separating the role from management structures. Critically, APs and ILT Stars do not undertake graded observations, they do however, support individuals who are not yet meeting college standards.



We're like peers... we work with our peers, we're not seniors, we're not above or better than the other staff, but we may have more experience and we can tap into other people's resources. I think that makes us more accessible so it's more likely that staff will approach you or you can approach them after feedback from observations or a need that's been picked up rather than managers saying you must do this.

Advanced Practitioner

At Barnsley College, APs and ILT Stars do not have a set timetable remittance. Instead their remittance is flexible and responsive, and depends on the needs of the department at any given time of year.



We look at how much time they need to do the job. We don't specify to HODs... we have a forward thinking senior leadership team who will actually say to HODs, "The APs and ILT stars need the time to do the job". If the department has a lot of new staff, then they need extra time when they start in September to actually support them.

Senior Manager

Barnsley College has 15 APs and 15 ILT Stars; one AP and one ILT Star per curriculum department. They receive a £2,000 salary uplift per annum and are on a two-year fixed-term contract with extension by review at the two-year point. Whilst the roles are located and deployed within curriculum departments, APs and ILT Stars have centralised fortnightly meetings. This is to share best practice and to work cross-college to deliver staff development weeks, such as a teacher's fair.



I think it's important that they are seen as part of that [department] team... I think there's a complexity in saying to a department, we're going to send somebody from a central function to help you improve your teaching and learning... the potential tension that creates can devalue the role.

Senior Manager

APs also have a part to play strategically. They form the Teaching and Learning Strategy group, review policies and procedures, and are encouraged to apply to the role based on a match between specialist expertise and college need:



We still run it as a two-year honorarium and the idea behind that is that we'll constantly review what we're particularly good at in teaching and learning and what we need to improve, and then we'll encourage people who are strong in the areas at a college level that we need to improve [to apply]... It evolves as a group in terms of the skills that the group's got according to what the college needs.

Senior Manager



The skills and attributes of a good Advanced Practitioner

- Deliver consistently **outstanding teaching** and maintain an **active teaching role**.
- Possess the **interpersonal skills** and confidence to **effectively coach others** and **build trusting relationships**.



It's massively important to be a good teacher... but I think it's an understanding of others, wanting to develop others, I think that's key... I think you've got to be a good people person, you've got to want to be helpful, a desire to improve others, because everyone should want to develop their own teaching, their own practice, but to want to help to improve others, not necessarily everyone wants to do.

Tutor

Activities

Advanced Practitioners have a number of different roles, these include:

- Conducting developmental observations and providing one-to-one feedback.
- Developing good practice resources, strategies and practices to disseminate across the college and to upload to the teaching and learning area on the staff intranet.
- Delivering regular training and CPD within their curriculum department.
- Delivering training associated with their individual specialisms, for example, equality and diversity, cross-college.
- Providing one-to-one individualised, tailored and bespoke support to teaching staff.
- Participating in and promoting peer practice.
- Mentoring and supporting new staff, including a mentored observation in their first month of teaching, and a condensed programme which covers common development themes.
- Undertaking supported experiments/action research projects to improve and develop teaching, learning and assessment methods.
- Promoting the creative use of Information Learning Technology in the curriculum.
- Co-ordinating and leading on teaching and learning training activities.
- Informal mentoring and coaching support.



One of the things I like... the day-to-day, you can bounce through the door and say "look have you got any ideas for this, can you do that?", and what they then do is go away and say, "actually we can include that in the next training session or staff training session" which is useful, so they're quite flexible as well with it... which I think is useful because then everyone is getting something out of it which is personal to you or other staff on the team.

Tutor

Workshops, CPD sessions and training activities are designed and delivered in response to developmental themes and inconsistent practice which has been identified during lesson observations and walkthroughs. Additionally, a staff Skills Matrix is used to identify training needs and informs the college training and development plan.



It's not a sheep-dip approach, we put on over 50 different workshops... and staff can choose in line with their line manager, because they all have their personal development plan, of where they need to go, so they can choose. It's not everybody has got to do this and everybody has got to do that, and that's really useful... you don't get people sat in things that they think, I can do this, what am I doing this for?

Senior Manager

Capability

In the first instance, APs and ILT stars have to be outstanding practitioners to be eligible to apply for the role. The team are coached and mentored by the Director of Teaching and Learning, and have fortnightly meetings which are focused on collaborative learning and sharing good practice. This can be taken away, adapted and cascaded to each department.

External training is delivered to APs and ILT Stars annually at a two-day residential. The team identify training during team discussions:



We work as a team, it's very much, what kind of training do you think we need? It's done through discussions, it's about always open and honest discussions about what is needed, what kind of coaching and mentoring the staff... feel that they need.

Senior Manager

Coaching and mentoring has been quite a strong theme over the last few years. That's strategies that we can use in our roles to direct and unpick situations... those conversations, and questioning for them helps.

Advanced Practitioner

Critically, the Director of Teaching and Learning has a budget which is used to backfill time and department budgets. This enables Heads of Department to release their staff for the AP role and is reviewed on a quarterly basis.



It's about supporting HODs, because again, it is the outstanding teachers who get the roles, and of course HODs want their outstanding teachers to be in front of the students. So it's trying to have the best of both worlds, so that we are training the APs and ILT Stars to train the staff and support the staff to be outstanding within their departments, and it's about having enough time to do that role.

Senior Manager

Outcomes



We are consistently... outstanding in terms of our teaching and learning, and I think that that is not solely, I wouldn't suggest solely, but is partly as a result of the work of Advanced Practitioners. I think that the innovation and the creation and the new ideas that you see in classrooms is a lot driven by that Advanced Practitioner group. I think that the sharing of good practice that gets us so we're largely consistently good or better [observation grades] is driven by that group as well. I think there's some definite tangible outcomes.

Senior Manager

- Improved observation grades following AP support and improved department grade profiles - 46 per cent Outstanding teaching and 92 per cent Good or Better.
- Improved staff retention.
- Staff that feel supported, more confident and valued by the organisation.
- Improved attendance and student achievement.
- Developing of a culture of learning and continuous improvement.
- Improvements to areas which have previously been identified as requiring improvement - evidenced through observations and walkthroughs following targeted CPD.
- Good attendance and positive feedback from CPD, training sessions and development weeks.



When one isn't in place, you can tangibly see a reduction in the department's performance. I don't say it's simply because of them [the APs] but there is evidence there.

Senior Manager

Without her I don't think I'd have got through the first year of teaching. They taught me how to do teachers files, they taught me how to do my lesson planning, how to bring in British Values... how to talk to students... I would not have got through this year without them.

Tutor

It's not all about Ofsted, but if you look at what Ofsted judge you on, and they are a massive factor in how you're seen as a college in terms of your success and that. The outcomes that they look at are teaching, learning and assessment, and when you probably think about it they're [the APs] key to all that, just keeping you calm some days, telling you how to improve your paperwork, whatever it is, they're key in that. When Ofsted come, it's not just about that, but your day-to-day practice has improved and then when Ofsted come, you're just used to that level of things, so when Ofsted come, it's just business as usual.

Tutor

The APs also feel that there are many personal benefits associated with taking on the role:



In our jobs as teachers we're here to help people, so to help your peers as well is a massive bonus.

It's really rewarding... when you've helped a member of staff achieve something.

Advanced Practitioner

Shared learning



Top tips for other providers

- It is important that the advanced practitioner role is firmly separated from performance management structures.
- Introduce developmental observations and ensure that they are non-judgmental.
- Pick the right people.
- Give those in advanced practitioner roles sufficient time and support to do the role effectively.
- Secure senior management and Head of Department buy-in.
- Be responsive to the individual needs of staff and the emerging needs of the college.
- Have a clear direction and strategy .



It must have the backing and support of our governors, the senior leadership team and senior managers, it's a whole college approach... it's led and driven all the way through, it's up, down, sideways and out, but we've got the support of our senior leadership team and our governors, and to me that's critical, and I think it's helped us to be the College that we are.

Senior Manager

Think about what you want and then how you're going to get there... a plan of some kind. We would be lost without our APs and ILT Stars because they're absolutely fantastic at what they do, but it has to start somewhere and you have to have somebody with a clear idea of where they're going and what's going to be the benefit. We've had somebody with the foresight who set that off and we're now driving that journey and continuing it, and carrying it forward even further than that. It's not just about throwing money at things, it's if we do this, what are the benefits, yes cost is important because everybody is short of money, but for me, what it costs to actually give and have the APs is cost neutral in terms of what they bring to the role and the development of staff.

Senior Manager