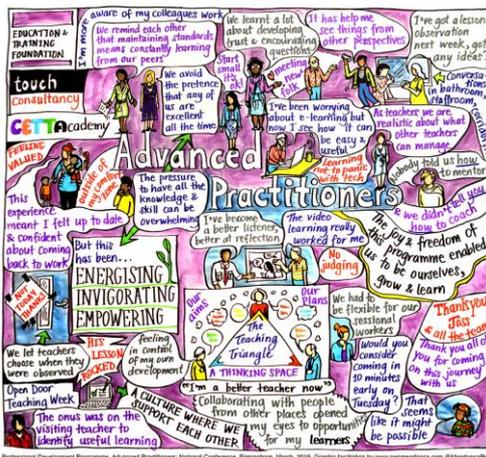


CASE STUDY: EVALUATING THE ADVANCED PRACTITIONER ROLE - EXPLORING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ADVANCED PRACTITIONERS IN ENABLING IMPROVED PRACTICE IN DISPERSED TEAMS

WORKERS' EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ADULT COMMUNITY LEARNING ESSEX

“WE NOW HAVE A MUCH CLEARER UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT AN AP COULD AND SHOULD LOOK LIKE IN OUR CONTEXT.”

April 2019



Graphic facilitation by www.penmendonca.com @MendoncaPen at Advanced Practitioner's National Conference - March 2019

OTLA 4 OUTSTANDING TEACHING LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT, SUPPORTED AND DELIVERED BY touchconsulting AND CETTAcademy

INTRODUCTION

This case study is from one of 15 collaborative projects, across a range of cross-sector partnerships, that were commissioned by the Education and Training Foundation to support Phase 4 of the Outstanding Teaching, Learning and Assessment (OTLA) programme.

This phase was delivered by touchconsulting and CETTAcademy to evaluate the role of Advanced Practitioners (APs), as defined by [Tyler et al \(2017\)](#)¹. The projects were intended to explore the [functions](#) and [values](#) of the AP role within the partnership's quality improvement priorities.

WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT?

This project sought to test the effectiveness of the AP role in improving teaching, learning and assessment when supporting sessional tutors. The partners, the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) and Adult Community Learning (ACL) Essex, face the challenge of supporting a dispersed workforce who are mainly hourly paid. Additionally, they have the challenge of ensuring that the workforce have good access to appropriate professional development opportunities.

In particular the partnership wanted to explore how they could:

- enhance induction processes and support for new tutors
- develop practitioner led resources to support all tutors
- extend the role of their existing APs to provide wider support to tutors using a blend of face to face and distance coaching, including online 'drop in' surgeries
- maximise the benefit of exchanging practice and ways of working across their two teams of APs.

In addition, the partners were keen to use the outcomes from the project to inform the thinking of their senior management teams, demonstrating how the AP role might be further developed to support organisational quality improvement plans and processes.

WHAT DID THE PROJECT DO?

Each partner began by consulting with tutors to collate a clear set of priorities for the project that were based on research and evidence of need. Tutors who had joined within the past 12 months identified what support would have helped them further during their induction and probation period.

This feedback was then used by the APs to:

- develop and pilot an induction checklist used by line managers to provide a framework with prompts and links to additional resources for inducting new staff

"There was a desire at the outset to share practice from each other as we were facing similar concerns. There was honesty and transparency within our discussions and with the way that we shared resources, including job descriptions. This openness ensured we gelled as a partnership and helped to propel the project forward."

Project Lead, WEA

Your First Year Drop-in Session

Delivery via Zoom
Total one hour, including Q&A

WEA
Adult Learning Within Reach

An online drop in session for new starters, delivered remotely by APs using video conferencing.

¹ Tyler, E., Marvell, R., Green, M., Martin, A., Williams, J. and Huxley, C. (2017) Institute for Employment Studies (2017). Understanding the role of Advanced Practitioners, (Education and Training Foundation)

- inform the content of a series of drop in surgeries delivered via video conferencing that covered topics such as 'What to expect during your first year', 'How to use the VLE' and 'What we mean by high quality IAG'. The process enabled tutors to ask questions, to meet other tutors online and forge professional relationships that could continue outside of the surgeries
- develop the way they coached staff both individually and in small groups, experimenting with digital tools (Zoom, Skype, BigBlueButton) to overcome the practical issues of distance, working times and geography
- steer the focus of teaching and learning resources they developed, including some bite size learning topics that were videoed and that will be used to support the professional development of the wider teaching workforce.

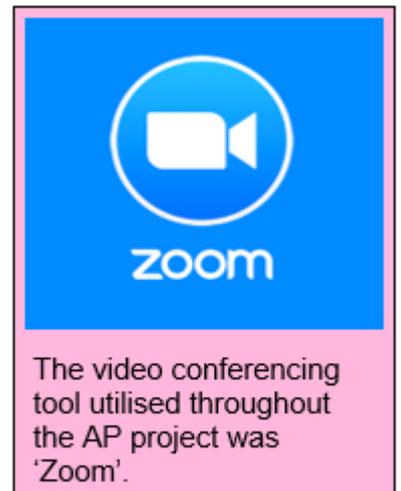
The APs from both organisations were keen to learn from each other, to exchange ideas and reflect openly on the successes and challenges of their work as their new roles evolved. To facilitate this, they met face to face twice, (at the beginning and the end of the project) and ran their own online professional exchange group which met monthly. They also established a Padlet page where they shared ideas and processes and contributed resources to a dedicated VLE area.

WHAT HELPED THE PROJECT SUCCEED?

The focus of the project was timely and was driven by an identified need that resonated across both partners. Turnover of new tutors was higher than was wanted, and some tutors in the greatest need were not always developing their practice in a timely manner. With predicted budget constraints across the ACL sector a new approach to supporting quality improvements was necessary.

Clear and effective communications between the partner organisations was a critical success factor. This ensured a truly collaborative approach, both to the design, delivery and evaluation of the project and to the exchange of information and practice between the two organisations. The Project Leads held monthly online meetings to check progress against key milestones. In order to secure wider awareness of the project they also reported on emerging outcomes at senior management and quality improvement team meetings and produced short articles for monthly newsletters distributed to all tutors.

All of the APs involved were tutors that had been identified as demonstrating good practice in their role. However, supporting and developing peers requires more than this. They were motivated by engaging with and sharing practice from different curriculum areas, from working across regions and from collaborating with colleagues from a different organisation. They developed a sense of ownership in the project which empowered them to grow together as a team and to remain engaged and motivated.



'It has been so valuable to discuss teaching methods with the other APs. It has really encouraged me to reflect on my own practice.'

Advanced Practitioner,
ACL Essex

WHAT CHALLENGES DID THE PROJECT FACE?

Both organisations were developing the AP role against a backdrop of restrictive budgets and limited allocation of time. Whilst this was certainly a challenge, it facilitated a problem solving approach to the project. The team focused on finding solutions to facilitating the support staff needed, modelling what was possible within these restrictions whilst also highlighting what, in addition, would be desirable.

Experimenting with technology caused some frustrations – both across the teams of APs when they wanted to communicate with each other as well as when they were coaching staff. Access to the on-line meeting software used for the AP professional exchange took a while for both the group's elected facilitator and the APs themselves to feel confident with. In the initial stages of the project this caused some lack of momentum. APs within WEA were largely conversant with using Zoom to deliver training, however, some staff who were being coached and/or were new to the organisation indicated that they would prefer a blend of face to face and distance support (including communication via video conferencing, telephone and email).

All of the APs involved were 'good' or better tutors but supporting and developing peers requires more than this. The partnership did not have the time or the capacity to invest in developing the coaching and mentoring skills of the team as a whole, which meant that initially not all APs felt fully confident and comfortable in aspects of their new role.

WHAT DIFFERENCE DID THE PROJECT MAKE?

The project challenged the pre-conceptions held by the project leads about the role of the AP and where it should sit within their organisations. Driven by feedback from the APs themselves they have moved away from what [Tyler et al](#)² describe as a 'deficit' model, offering support only to those who have been identified through formal lesson observations as requiring development.

Instead they are now embracing a 'universal' approach, with APs providing peer to peer, non-judgemental support to all tutors and assessors at different stages of their professional development. In addition, ACL Essex has also moved away from the idea of each curriculum area having its own AP, to appointing APs who will provide support across ACL curriculum areas. This will facilitate the sharing of good practice, maximise resources (time, travel, AP costs), and make the role more responsive to demand.

Sharing of practice has resulted in the partnership amending and enhancing their induction processes for new staff. Both have seen the impact of APs working alongside new staff as 'buddies' and will perpetuate this. The schedule of online drop in surgeries that were developed are now available as part of the support offer as is an induction checklist for managers, developed by an AP in WEA, which will ensure consistency in the information and guidance that is offered to all new staff.



'We now have a much clearer understanding of what an AP could and should look like within our context and have a team of enthusiastic tutors lined up to make this happen!'

Project Lead, WEA

² Tyler, E., Marvell, R., Green, M., Martin, A., Williams, J. and Huxley, C. (2017) Institute for Employment Studies (2017). Understanding the role of Advanced Practitioners, (Education and Training Foundation)

The project has also impacted on the confidence and skills of the APs themselves. A survey capturing what difference the project made to them included feedback on greater confidence in their own abilities, a readiness to take on new challenges, enhanced time management skills and 'better digital skills, in particular with regards to using on-line meeting platforms.'

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

For further information please visit the Advanced Practitioner OTLA

Projects Padlet page here: <https://en-gb.padlet.com/joss1/collabprojects>

Or contact:

Sylvia Gentleman, WEA: SGentleman@wea.org.uk and/or

Teresa Ablewhite, ACL Essex: Teresa.Ablewhite@essex.gov.uk

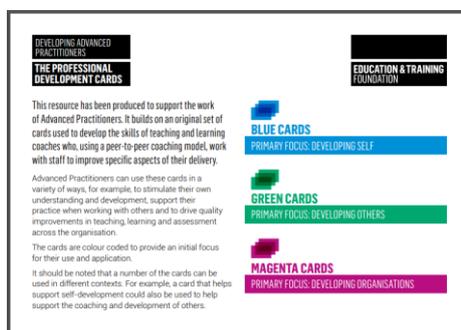
'At ACL Essex we are now looking forward to APs becoming a new role within our organisation.'

Project Lead, ACL Essex

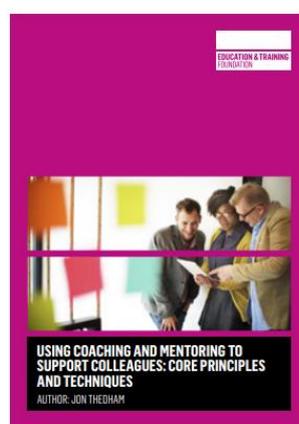
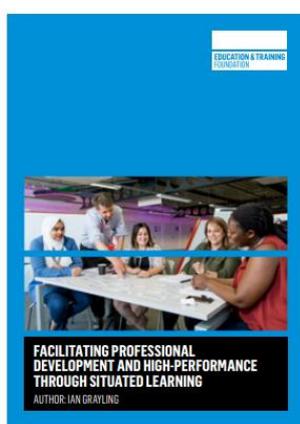
RESOURCES SUPPORTING THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME FOR ADVANCED PRACTITIONERS (OTLA 4) – 2018/2019

CLICK ON THE IMAGE TO ACCESS THE RESOURCE

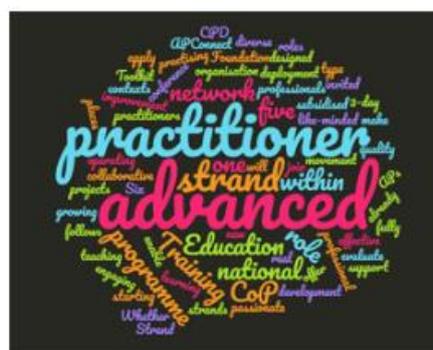
- Advanced Practitioner Toolkit – Professional Development Cards



- Advanced Practitioner Toolkit – Practical AP Guides



- Advanced Practitioner Monthly Communications



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