

Bespoke consultancy case study

Hampshire Sixth Form Colleges' Partnership

consultancy & services

The Hampshire Sixth Form Colleges' Partnership is proactively cultivating talented leaders from within

The partnership of eleven sixth form colleges in Hampshire decided to engage with *Bespoke consultancy*, run by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS), to create a bespoke development programme for their middle and senior managers. The partnership had identified a need to increase the leadership talent in their colleges and create a home-grown pool of leadership talent.

Aware of the need to increase the leadership capacity of managers in the colleges, principals in the partnership decided to pilot a bespoke development programme for middle managers. This was a rather unique step in the field of education, but one which was essential to meet the need for a strong home-grown pool of leadership talent.

Liz Winn, Manager of the Partnership, chose to team up

with the Centre of Excellence in Leadership (now the Learning and Skills Improvement Service), to help shape the course outline and deliver elements of the content.

Creating a place that people aspire to be a part of

Liz's vision for the programme is to create forward thinking, visionary, inspiring leaders, making the partnership a place that people aspire to be a part of.

Three years on and the reputation of the *Middle managers' programme* is firmly embedded internally. With only 15 places available per year, it's a very motivating experience for managers to be selected.

A *Senior managers' programme* has now also been added to the repertoire and feedback shows that the programmes are delivering essential leadership skills.

Bespoke consultancy

Bespoke consultancy is a tailored consulting approach. It is delivered in-house, at a pace, in a style and at a budget that suits you. Our primary focus is to increase sustainable effectiveness and organisational health, using structured and planned consultancy and leadership development interventions.

Every organisation has its own culture, goals and aspirations. For this reason, we work in partnership with you to develop a process that meets your specific requirements. We focus on organisational development at three levels: the organisation, the team or department and the individual.

You may be undergoing a period of change or seeking to address specific challenges. For example:

- redesigning your organisation for future readiness
- a merger
- a new leadership team
- an inspection
- a new build
- new strategic partnerships.

To meet such challenges successfully requires the ability to look at where your organisation needs to be, where it is now and how you can bridge the gap. It involves 'hard' elements – structure, strategies, plans, measurements, finance and 'soft' elements – leadership, culture, values, vision and behaviours.

For more information; visit www.centreforexcellence.org.uk

The programmes' objectives were:

- To provide an understanding of the role of leaders in sixth form colleges
- To create individual and collective awareness of the skills and behaviour needed to lead organisations effectively
- To provide managers with an understanding of their own leadership styles and motivation together with strategies for improving their impact
- To provide managers with skills and information to improve the performance of their teams and areas of responsibility in the context of whole college goals
- To improve managers' understanding of their operating environment, including strategy and vision, within and outside sixth form colleges
- To provide managers with awareness of sound financial management skills.



Designing the programmes

“In the first year I constructed the programme myself”, recalls Liz. “It was well received, which proved to me it was on the right lines, but I decided to approach CEL to check that it matched the standards of its own leadership framework and had a synthesis beyond separate training ‘events’.

“It was an affirming experience, because I found the content I had developed did fit into CEL’s framework. They then helped me map out the programme, providing a context, and eventually assisted me with some of the delivery, introducing a very dynamic style, with games, video clips and a lot of learning from within the participant group itself.

“The lead consultant at CEL is fantastic. She listens. She delivers to a very high standard and once I’ve identified training gaps, puts me in touch with some very talented people to fill them. She has a vast hinterland of experience and knowledge which means that if I’ve been struggling with something that doesn’t work, she and I are able to talk to work out if the gap is in the original brief or due to the way the modules connect. We’re in constant contact.”

Staying on target

Liz believes it is a process of evolution, taking on board feedback from participants and refining accordingly. “When they tell you it was the best course they had been on in their career, as someone did recently, you know you’re on target!”

The evaluation feedback on the various programmes, both immediately after delivery and also six months later has demonstrated learning and positive impact on behaviours. This continuing check on progress enables the partnership to fine tune the programme design and delivery.

The programmes are structured with two intense off-site days at the beginning looking at personal leadership style, which, along with the learning, maximises the team bonding and networking opportunities. This is then followed by a series of workshops over a six month period, with plenty of time between each one for reflection.

Each participant is allocated a mentor to support them on their learning journey and to help apply the learning.

The design enables many different learning preferences to be met, from large group work, to personal reflection, and makes the best use of both internal and external resources. The bespoke nature of the programme design allows for input from a range of trainers and experts – including from senior managers and principals within the partnership.

Jo Dale, the lead consultant, herself comments,

“LSIS’s whole philosophy is to be as flexible as possible. We can tailor programmes to fit the budget, and either design and deliver the whole thing, or put together innovative content to be delivered by others. Either way, our consultants are able to bring a huge range of perspectives from within and beyond further education.”

Permeating a positive leadership style through the whole system

“The key to designing good leadership development is to create a connection between the various learning elements, be they personal leadership profiles or mentoring sessions, and particularly to strategically connect the content of the workshops.” Jo Dale comments.

“It is essential that participants build on previous knowledge, creating a progressive journey.

I communicate regularly with Liz to ensure that all those involved in delivery are fully briefed on what has happened previously. Liz also sits in on all the sessions, both middle and senior management. That provides the thread of continuity, allowing discussion points from previous sessions to filter through to course facilitators as well as participants and their mentors. This in turn helps to

permeate a positive leadership style through the whole partnership system.

"It's an absolute pleasure working with someone who owns the project and who has brought us in to engage with the design rather than tell them what to do. Liz is passionate about leadership development. She's straight talking, tenacious and exemplifies partnership working."

Effective leadership ultimately benefits students

As the programmes' in-built evaluation and review has demonstrated, there is now more readiness to tackle underperforming staff.

Clare Powell, a Student Support Manager who recently finished the *Middle managers' programme* says, "Previously, when dealing with staff conflict situations, I didn't always put myself in that member of staff's shoes. I'm now much more receptive to other peoples' ways of viewing and dealing with situations. Reduction in conflict increases camaraderie and reduces isolation, and at the end of Reduction in conflict increases camaraderie and reduces isolation, and at the end of the day, it's all to the benefit of the students."

Assistant Principal, Catherine Richards, agrees. "It has given me a much richer understanding about the practical realities of leading organisations and teams. I now work at creating an environment where people are not afraid of risks or making changes which benefit students."

"It was wicked!" says Mark Hughes, Assistant Head of PE.

"I am now more multi-dimensional as a manager, able to use new tactics to get the best from a situation. I'm trying out motivational techniques with students as well as colleagues and currently my class has the highest attendance rate in the department. The fact that I was promoted during the programme shows that it works."

Long term confidence

Oona Taylor, Head of Guidance feels it has given her more confidence. "I've learnt that it's OK to make mistakes and to not give up when I have set backs. Now when I take on more responsibility, I try to be less of a perfectionist. This can feel uncomfortable but I recognise the benefits. I work under two assistant principals who have different leadership styles and have been able to apply a wider range of techniques when communicating

with them. The programme has also improved the way I work with staff in my cross college role."

Catherine Richards has seen the sense of growing confidence translate into a willingness to talk more openly about things like promotion, strengths, approaches and leadership styles.

"As senior managers, we are delegating more. We are more confident and more decisive about change rather than procrastinating and checking. We are not afraid to confront underperformance and take action accordingly."

Head of Department, Liz Lee describes one-to-one mentoring as one of the key aspects of the programme. Having the perspective of someone in a very senior role was highly beneficial.

Clare Powell concludes, "Long may the partnership continue to champion these programmes!"



Hampshire Sixth Form Colleges' Partnership – Senior managers programme participants - Simon Barrable, Catherine Richards, Simon Jenkins, Ali Foss, Anthony Jankowski, Liz Lee, Jon Myers, Natalie Milner, Esther Silver, Alexandra Banks, Julia Tucker, Mark Henderson and Liz Winn, Partnership Manager.

Hampshire Sixth Form Colleges' Partnership

The Hampshire Sixth Form Colleges' Partnership is a network of the eleven sixth form colleges in Hampshire. It was established in 1997 to strengthen the services offered to students. The colleges represent more than 10 per cent of sixth form colleges nationally. This means that working as a collective gives them greater influence and authority. The partnership:

- Encourages and facilitates networks of staff and managers in colleges
- Shares good practice to improve services to students
- Negotiates with service providers for discounts for group purchases
- Provides local training opportunities using external and in-house expertise
- Responds to and influences national educational developments.

See www.hampshiresfc.ac.uk

About the Learning and Skills Improvement Service

The Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) came into operation on 1 October 2008. Combining the best aspects of two different and highly successful sector bodies – the Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL) and the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) – LSIS will work closely with the sector, as its key partner, to focus on learners and on supporting excellence, sustainable provision and self-regulation in the further education and skills sector. Leadership development will underpin and form an important part of the organisation's strategic role in the sector.

LSIS was established after consultations with sector leaders identified a strong desire for an organisation that would be sector-led. As a sector-owned public body, LSIS will be owned, directed and governed by further education and skills colleges and providers – the first time that this vibrant sector's talent is being harnessed to participate in this way.

LSIS will be consulting with the sector during autumn 2008 and spring 2009 about its priorities and remit. While this is taking place, the activities and services of CEL and QIA will continue under joint branding; more information about their range of activities is available on their respective websites.

To find out more about *Bespoke* consultancy or any other LSIS programmes, services and events; please contact LSIS or visit the website:

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