



WESSEX
GROUP
OF 6TH FORM
COLLEGES

WORKING IN HAMPSHIRE
PORTSMOUTH
SOUTHAMPTON

GUIDE TO
COLLEGE
PARTNERSHIPS

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PURPOSE OF THE GUIDE

For over a decade, the Wessex Group of Sixth Form Colleges¹ has established a range of shared approaches to improving services, saving money and developing staff. This resource describes its work and identifies some of the reasons for the Group's longevity and success. We hope that by describing some of the activities and strategies used by the Group, we will help to encourage more partnership activity within post-16 colleges; and that new developments will have a better chance of taking root.

This is no prescription or blueprint. There are many examples of successful college partnerships, some of which operate on a very similar level to the Wessex Group (see *A Flexible Template*, opposite). Others operate differently for a variety of reasons and follow different visions. The whole point is that partnerships develop out of a mutual interest in pursuing a common agenda.

What we have tried to do is to offer an idea of the many opportunities and activities that arise from working collaboratively; the factors contributing to success; and the benefits (including financial) of partnership. The resource offers a **flexible template** of partnership activity with tips, case studies, examples, description and analysis. The format of the resource allows users to examine particular aspects of our work in detail – from leadership development to joint procurement – and to learn something from our experience. We have also located the

booklets on our website² and will add additional resources from time to time as we identify aspects of our work that might be useful to others.

AUDIENCE

The resource is aimed primarily at senior strategic managers and thinkers who are interested in learning more about the benefits of partnership working. It has been written with Principals, Vice-Principals and governors in mind, although other leaders in colleges might find it of benefit, especially where they have a particular interest in one or more activities as described in the booklets.



A FLEXIBLE TEMPLATE

We know that many colleges are already working in partnerships – as part of 14-19 consortia, as groups established for peer review and performance management, as purchasing consortia etc. Some groups, such as S7, FE Sussex and the Wessex Group, provide a wide range of services to their member organisations. Others have joined together for a specific purpose eg CENBASE which works with six geographically dispersed colleges to improve quality through a robust peer quality review and validation process. Some groups have a more diverse membership than one type of institution eg the Merseyside College

Association which represents all seven further education and three sixth form colleges in Greater Merseyside. Yet others established a group for a specific purpose and then expanded their activities eg the NorVic Federation.

There is therefore no one model which defines the activities of a partnership of sixth form colleges. However, together, the many activities of the Wessex Group of Sixth Form Colleges and others can form a flexible template for partnership working.

¹ Formerly the Hampshire Sixth Form Colleges' Partnership

² www.wessexsfc.ac.uk



PURPOSE

SOME ACTIVITIES

Leadership development

- Whole partnership talent management
- Work shadowing schemes
- In-house leadership programmes
- Post-programme reviews and impact assessments

Quality improvement

- Curriculum Support Groups with a focus on teaching and learning
- Sharing good practice via peer meetings and email-based queries or web-based formats
- Peer Review and Development Groups working across colleges and across groups of colleges
- Periodic training / briefing events with a quality focus
- Common inset days

Value for money

- Sharing costs of training events
- Arranging for national trainers to deliver locally
- Using a mixture of external and in-house trainers and expertise to deliver bespoke programmes at a much reduced cost than national organisations

Joint procurement

- Joint purchasing agreements
- Discounts as bulk purchasers
- Enhanced negotiating power for some providers
- Investigating shared services

Influencing

- Sharing intelligence from representation on national and local boards
- A ready-made forum for external briefings and dialogue
- Collective strength and enhanced influencing capacity

Innovating

- Providing a test-bed for new approaches eg new assessment processes
- Encouraging innovators and policy shapers to share their work in local conferences and meetings
- Holding events for key partnership strategists to plan approaches to new policy landscapes

There are guides to embarking on these activities, including their impact and benefits; timescales; management and review; best practice and minimum requirements; and costs. These form the basis of the resource pack.

RESOURCE CONTENTS

- 2. The Wessex Group**
- 3. Setting up a partnership**
- 4. Leadership development**
- 5. Improving quality**
- 6. Curriculum Support Groups**
- 7. Staff training and development**
- 8. Joint purchasing and shared services**

This resource has been written by Liz Winn.

Barbara Spender wrote the booklet on Curriculum Support Groups.

USEFUL SITES

www.wessexsfc.ac.uk
www.eqr.org.uk
www.mca.ac.uk
www.s7colleges.com
www.fesussex.org.uk



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Queen Mary's College



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This resource has been written by Liz Winn

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