



Bedford College Student Involvement Strategy

Vision statement

Bedford College is committed to consulting its students on all aspects of the organisation, including teaching and learning, facilities, support services and overall strategic direction. The importance of the student focus in creating high quality learning experiences is enshrined in the College's values and Strategic Plan.

The College is very diverse, and includes full and part-time students on a range of premises as well as apprentices and work-based learners. All students have an equal voice, although how they exercise that voice may vary according to the nature of their relationship to the College.

Context

The Further Education White Paper *Further Education: Raising skills, improving life chances* set out a requirement for all colleges to have in place a strategy for involving students and to publish it by September 2007.

This builds on earlier commitments under the Every Child Matters agenda, the outcomes of which are also incorporated into the Common Inspection Framework for inspection purposes. An effective student involvement strategy supports the delivery of the outcomes for young people, particularly 'Enjoy and Achieve' and 'Make a Positive Contribution', as well as providing evidence of the College's capacity to improve and deliver educational inclusion.

The National Learner Panel established by the Minister of State for Lifelong Learning in 2006 has shared its vision of an organisation 'in which learner involvement is embedded throughout the organisational culture, learner representation is strong and responsiveness to the needs of the individual has helped to improve provision'.

Clause 21 of the current Further Education and Training Bill proposes a requirement for governing bodies of further education colleges to have regard to guidance about consultation with students and potential students, and responsiveness to learners is a key strand within the LSC's Framework for Excellence.

Benefits of student involvement

The potential benefits to both the College and its students of effective student involvement are:

- increased participation, retention, achievement and progression
- more independent, motivated and self-confident learners
- better feedback on the student experience to inform quality improvements and strategic decision making
- services and facilities which are better targeted to student needs
- identification and sharing of best practice.

Involving students collectively

Bedford College recognises that involving students in all aspects of the organisation will support us in our journey from good to great by increasing our responsiveness to the needs both of individuals and of the wider College community. We are therefore committed to embedding a culture of student involvement throughout the College.

This strategy includes a number of different approaches to enable us to listen to the student voice:

- **Consultation** –activity, primarily but not wholly College- initiated, aimed at gathering students' views through formal and informal feedback mechanisms
- **Representation** – using formal structures such as course representatives and student governors
- **Participation** in College life – through internal events and activities and, externally, through links with the local community.

Where are we now?

Consultation

The Quality Department manages a suite of cross-College mechanisms for eliciting feedback including:

- whole College student surveys, conducted bi-annually, administered by Student Ambassadors and fed back to departmental staff
- a complaints, compliments and suggestions system ('Have Your Say') available online via the student intranet.

Teaching departments may seek targeted feedback, for example on individual modules, sessions and assignments. Whether and how feedback is sought is variable across the College, with no consistent/standardised practice.

Student Services, as part of its continuous quality improvement activity under the Matrix standard, has a client feedback strategy and seeks feedback on a wide range of services using a variety of formal and informal methods including:

- focus groups
- targeted feedback questionnaires on specific areas of service activity
- opinion polls
- telephone surveys (using Student Ambassadors)
- informal discussion and observed behaviours.

Marketing employ a range of techniques to gain feedback from prospective and current students:

- focus groups and questionnaires to get student feedback on the design, layout and navigation of the College's prospectuses and website
- informal feedback from Student Ambassadors on open day format and design
- questionnaires to prospective students on their attendance at open days to help identify areas for improvement
- quantitative and qualitative research with various student groups to aid curriculum planning and design
- interviews with students to find out about their experience at College so that the student voice can be communicated to prospective students, for example through case studies.

The College values feedback, and there is no come-back on students who, either individually or collectively, make complaints, raise grievances or suggest improvements.

Representation

Bedford College has a Student Council with officers, elected by course representatives, including representatives on College committees (e.g. the health and safety committee). The Council reports twice a year to the Board of Governors, and holds monthly open surgeries in the Refectory in order to provide a platform for the student body. Its effectiveness has however been limited, and it has proved difficult to maintain its momentum throughout the academic year.

It has for many years had two student governors, one more than the statutory requirement, and given them membership on College boards including the key Quality, Standards and Achievement Committee which has responsibility for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning.

All courses are required to nominate a course representative. Use of course reps varies across College, but where best practice exists they are used to represent students' views in course meetings. All reps are invited to meet the

Principal once a year and groups of Board members during their annual development day in College.

Participation

The College has a varied enrichment programme. Participation is promoted by a lively and vibrant Freshers' Fair during induction week. Cross-College events such as Flying Start and health and diversity weeks raise awareness of wider citizenship issues (including behaviour, respect) and address the Every Child Matters agenda.

Programme areas offer a range of opportunities to participate in enrichment activities and short courses to enhance their learning and employability, including trips, competitions and projects delivered in collaboration with the local community.

The Marketing Department employs a team of Student Ambassadors who are paid to undertake a range of promotional and quality-related activities across College.

Where do we want to be?

We will:

- deliver a programme of training to ensure all staff are aware of the value of learner involvement in improving our provision and services
- ensure all Centre Directors, Assistant Directors and Course Managers know and have met with their course reps
- use course reps more effectively by developing clearer guidelines/job description and monitoring their implementation, to include holding focus groups with their peers, attending meetings with course team/Student Council/Student Services/Principal, involvement in programme area MOTs
- consider how best to reward student involvement
- brief governors on the importance and value to the organisation of the student voice
- submit the Student involvement Strategy to the Board
- review the role and identity of the Student Council including increasing representation on cross-College groups
- develop a programme of training for students, starting with the Student Council, student governors, committee members and course representatives, to help them develop the confidence and expertise to participate fully, including attending external seminars targeted specifically at student governors
- consider whether the College should affiliate to the National Union of Students
- request all support managers to indicate how they intend to incorporate the student voice into their practice
- roll out the online opinion poll piloted in 2006/7

- ensure students see change by feeding back the outcomes of consultation exercises ('You said.... We did....')
- set targets for student survey completion and post survey results on the student intranet
- increase awareness of 'Have Your Say'
- expand the scope of Matrix accreditation within Student Services and further develop feedback activity
- undertake student views surveys as part of the LSC Framework for Excellence pilot
- undertake focus groups with students receiving additional support
- explore ways of involving students in policy development/monitoring and in strategy including curriculum, accommodation, timetabling and services
- introduce regular Principal and Executive Question Times
- increase opportunities for community involvement within programme areas and via the enrichment programme e.g. sustainability projects, working with Police Community Support Officer
- develop a peer support programme including training for student participants
- develop a social/support network for students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties
- evaluate and adopt social networking and Web 2.0 technologies as a communication tool for course reps.

Involving students individually

Student involvement also includes the need for students to be involved in shaping their own learning experience. By increasing students' understanding of their own needs and preferred styles we will enable them to participate in a dialogue about their learning and become 'expert learners'. This will result not only in more effective feedback on teaching and learning but will also create a learning programme which is personalised to the students' individual needs.

Where are we now?

The induction programme includes:

- an initial skills assessment to identify further literacy/numeracy development needs
- a learning styles questionnaire to identify student's preferred approach to learning and studying.

The tutorial framework includes an entitlement to regular one-to-one meetings with a tutor to:

- discuss progress
- develop an individual action plan and set realistic but challenging targets which raise aspirations
- identify and resolve any barriers to learning.

Student surveys include a range of questions relating to students' experience of teaching and learning.

Student support services contribute to the development of students' confidence, independence and motivation by helping individuals to:

- identify and achieve career and learning goals
- set their sights as high as possible
- work through personal problems which are getting in the way of learning
- resolve practical difficulties
- participate in the wider College community.

Where do we want to be?

We will:

- promote personalisation and differentiation in learning programmes, supported by appropriate CPD opportunities
- support and encourage the use of e-communications to strengthen the dialogue between student and tutor
- develop our virtual learning environments to further empower our students to evaluate, manage and pace their own learning
- evaluate and adopt social networking and Web 2.0 technologies that support the development of learning communities
- continue to strengthen tutorial provision through the observation and MOT processes
- develop a comprehensive CPD programme for tutors
- develop a peer support network.

Responsibilities

Student involvement and responsiveness to the student voice are everyone's responsibility and must be embedded in all areas of the College, especially in relation to teaching, learning and curriculum development. All teaching managers must ensure that they consult with their student body on a regular basis, particularly with regard to making effective use of course representatives.

The Director of Student Services will ensure the student voice is reflected at Executive level. The Student Support Manager has specific responsibility for liaising with students, including developing and supporting the Student Council and other opportunities for representation and participation. The Manager reports annually to the Board of Governors on matters relating to student involvement.

The Chair of the Board and of the Quality, Standards and Achievement Committee, assisted by the Clerk to the Corporation, will ensure that the student voice is fully reflected at all meetings.

Promoting the strategy

To staff

The strategy will be launched at a whole College meeting, and followed up at, for example, course team and support area meetings, TILT and the College Executive.

To students

The College's vision in relation to student involvement and how students can exercise their voice will be promoted via a range of media including:

- tutors and Assistant Directors at induction
- Flying Start
- student handbook,
- group sessions and focus groups
- the student intranet
- student newsletters
- Student Council open surgeries
- New Horizons and the applicant information pack (for prospective students).

A consistent message will be given to students that there will be no adverse come-back as a result of any complaints or negative feedback, other than in exceptional circumstances if there is found to be malicious intent.

Monitoring and reporting on the impact of the strategy

The action plan relating to the whole strategy will be monitored annually by the Executive. Elements of the strategy will be monitored through quarterly performance monitoring reports as follows:

- Centre Director reports (improvements made as a result of listening to students)
- Quality reports (survey results including Framework for Excellence pilot, complaints).

The student voice will be embedded in course reviews and in teaching and support department self assessment reports and managers will be expected to seek, act on and report the outcomes of student feedback.

Feedback will be given to staff where students have commented on good practice and students will be informed about improvements made as a result of their formal or informal feedback.

Equality and diversity statement

Bedford College is committed to the promotion and development of equality and diversity. We aim to provide a working and learning environment which values individuals equally regardless of age, disability, ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, religious belief or trade union membership.

In implementing this strategy we will provide appropriate opportunities for involvement for the full range of learners, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, religious belief, learning difficulty and/or disability, type of course or mode of attendance.

Related documents

- Further Education: Raising skills, improving life chances (DfES, 2006)
- Developing a learner involvement strategy (LSC, 2007)
- Common Inspection Framework (Ofsted)
- Framework for Excellence (LSC, 2007)
- Matrix Quality Standard
- Student Services Client Feedback Strategy
- Bedford College Tutorial Policy and Entitlement
- Bedford College Complaints Procedure

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August 2007