

Bedford College Group Student Involvement Strategy (Further Education)

1. Vision statement

The Bedford College Group is committed to

- consulting its students on all aspects of the organisation, including teaching, learning and assessment, facilities, support services and overall strategic direction.
- providing opportunities for students to participate in the College community.
- supporting the effective running of a Students' Union.

The importance of the student focus in creating high quality learning experiences is enshrined in the College's values and strategic plans.

The College is diverse, and includes full and part-time learners on a range of campuses as well as higher education students, apprentices and work-based learners. The term 'student' in this strategy is used to denote all those engaged in learning with the College.

All students have an equal voice, although how they exercise that voice may vary according to the nature of their relationship to the College.

2. Context

The Further Education White Paper *Further Education: Raising skills, improving life chances* published in 2006 set out a requirement for all colleges to have in place and publish a strategy for involving students.

In 2011 the coalition government's reform plan for further education, 'New Challenges, New Chances', said that students should be at the heart of the FE and skills system. This, together with the instruments and articles of governance, means that corporations need to be responsive to students' views in carrying out their duties. Although there is no longer the same formal requirement to publish a student involvement strategy, there continues to be an expectation, including by Ofsted, that the student voice will be at the heart of what we do, and central to our strategic aspiration to deliver

- an exceptional student experience
- a successful student experience
- a successful outcome.

There is a separate Bedford College Group Student Engagement Strategy for Higher Education in accordance with the QAA Quality Code for Higher Education.

3. Benefits of student involvement

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

- increased participation, retention, achievement, success 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.

4. Involving students collectively

The Bedford College Group recognises that involving students in all aspects of the organisation will support us in delivering on our strategic plan 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:

- **Inform** – information and activities that inform wider students cohort
- **Consult** –activity, primarily but not wholly College- initiated, aimed at gathering students' views through formal and informal feedback like focus group snap surveys.
- **Engage** - using formal structures such as course representatives and student voice network meetings.
- **Partner** – elected group and special interests representative that look at thematic agendas and developments
- **Lead** - elected student with links to the College senior management and governors, focus of strategic and governance work

Where are we now?

Inform

The College has a varied programme of enhancement activities delivered through study programmes and cross-College. Participation is promoted by personal tutors and via the lively and vibrant Freshers' Fair during induction week. Cross-College themed events (e.g. Health & Wellbeing, Equality & Diversity) increase students' awareness of wider lifestyle and citizenship issues, contribute to meeting Ofsted's expectations in relation to personal development, behaviour and wellbeing, and provide additional opportunities to promote the core values of modern Britain.

Programme areas offer a range of opportunities to participate in enhancement and skills development activities to enrich their learning and employability, including trips, competitions and projects delivered in collaboration with employers and the local community. Digital tools for students to record their involvement in enhancement and wider College activity, and evidence their skills and employability development have been established via pro-monitor.

Consult

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

- whole College surveys
- a complaints, compliments and suggestions system available online via the virtual learning environment (VLE) and the website.

Teaching departments may seek targeted feedback, for example on individual units, sessions and assignments.

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

- focus groups
- targeted feedback questionnaires on specific areas of service activity
- informal discussion and observed behaviours.

The Marketing Department employs a range of techniques to gain feedback from prospective and current learners including for example:

- focus groups and questionnaires to elicit student feedback on the design, layout and navigation of the College's prospectuses and website
- feedback from prospective students and parents on College open days
- quantitative and qualitative research with various student/stakeholder groups to aid curriculum planning and design and the development of services
- 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
- recruitment of students as mystery shoppers with a view to improving customer service throughout the student journey.

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

Engage

The Bedford College Group has Student Voice Network at each campus comprising of course representatives. The Student Voice Network meet half termly, facilitated by Student Services staff who take forward any issues raised to the relevant manager, and give feedback on progress. There is an annual Student Voice conference which focuses on a topical theme, and an additional opportunity to meet senior managers ('Exec Question Time').

All courses of 6 hours per week or more nominate 2 course representatives to give an insight into students' views at course, programme area and centre level. As a minimum, as well as attending termly course review meetings, they meet formally with their Director and Head of Department.

Partner

The Bedford College Group Students' Union is established and facilitated by Student Services staff. The Students' Union is made up of elected students groups and special interests representative that look at thematic agendas and developments.

The union exec meets half termly with special interest groups meeting more regularly and feeding back into the Student' Union structure.

Lead

There are two elected student governors. The student governors offer a perspective on the learner experience but do not act under any mandate as representing the entirety of the student body.

Where do we want to be?

We will:

- continue to develop the effectiveness of course reps
- increase participation in Student Voice conference year on year
- produce a student-friendly version of this strategy to be promoted at induction and on the Student Services website
- ensure students continue to have opportunities to meet with the senior management team
- ensure all student voice activity and its outcomes are publicised, including on the Student Services website, via tutorials and to the Executive
- further develop cross-College Group enhancement opportunities within 16-18 study programmes
- maximise opportunities to promote the core values of modern Britain.

5. Involving students individually

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

Where are we now?

The induction programme includes:

- an initial skills assessment to identify further maths/English development needs
- the development of Individual Support Plans where additional needs have been identified.

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

- discuss progress
- 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, learning and assessment.

Student support services contribute to the development of students' confidence, employability, 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:

- continue to ensure study programmes and courses meet individual needs
- ensure our restructured support services continue to meet the needs of individuals, by maintaining our Matrix quality accreditation and through ongoing quality assurance and CPD.

6. Responsibilities

Student involvement and responsiveness to the student voice are everyone's responsibility and are embedded in all areas of the College, especially in relation to teaching, learning and assessment, curriculum development and service delivery.

Teaching directors and managers will ensure that they consult with their student body on a regular basis, make effective use of course representatives and provide feedback on actions taken.

Support directors and managers will involve students in reviewing, developing and improving services to make them more responsive to the needs of our customers.

The Quality Department will manage a range of processes for obtaining feedback from across the student body and publishing the results.

The Director of Sales and Marketing will undertake qualitative and quantitative research with current and prospective students to inform the development of curriculum and services.

The Director of Student Services will ensure the student voice is reflected at Executive level, with the Student Experience and Progression Manager having responsibility for liaising with students, developing and supporting

Student Voice Network and Student' Union and providing other opportunities for representation and participation.

The Executive team will continue to maximise opportunities to interact with the student body.

The Chairs of the Board and any relevant committees, assisted by the Clerk to the Corporation, will ensure that the student voice is fully reflected at all meetings.

7. Promoting the strategy

To staff

This strategy is publicised through internal communication channels and is made available to all staff via the staff intranet.

To students

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

- course teams and personal tutors at induction and in tutorials
- student handbooks and other induction materials including a student friendly version of this strategy
- the Student Services website, www.yourspaceonline.net , social media and the VLE
- Student Voice network and Students' Union meetings
- websites, prospectuses, social media and applicant information packs (for prospective students).

A consistent message is 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.

8. Monitoring and reporting on the impact of the strategy

The strategy is monitored annually by the Executive and reported to the Board of Governors via the Quality, Standards and Achievement Committee.

Student voice is embedded in course reviews and in teaching and support department self-assessment reports, and managers are expected to seek, act on and report the outcomes of student feedback.

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

9. Equality and diversity statement

The Bedford College Group is committed to the advancement and promotion of equality and diversity. We aim to provide a learning and working environment which values individuals equally.

It is our duty and obligation under the Equality Act 2010 to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- advance equality of opportunity
- foster good relations between different groups

The College does not disadvantage individuals by discriminating on any grounds, particularly - Disability, Age, Race, Gender (Sex), Religion and Belief, Sexual orientation, Gender reassignment, Pregnancy & Maternity and Marriage and Civil Partnership (not applicable to Education).

In implementing this strategy we aim to provide appropriate opportunities for involvement for the full range of learners, regardless of their individual characteristics, type of course or mode of attendance.

Will Sparrow
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