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‘Outstanding Collaborative Partnerships’ and their significant effect on quality of provision



The Ofsted Report

Mode Training Ltd (MTL), an independent provider for the hairdressing sector, was inspected on 9th October 2009. Ofsted cited outstanding collaboration through peer review as a factor that helped MTL achieve a Grade 2 for overall effectiveness of provision and a Grade 1 for capacity to improve:

9. Through an outstanding collaborative partnership between six local hairdressing providers, the observation of teaching and learning and self-assessment processes and practices have significantly improved the provision. (Ofsted report on MTL 2009)

28. Partnership working to improve the overall quality of provision is outstanding. Through the Merseyside Hairdressing Forum, a peer review group of six training providers has worked together and shared systems and procedures. Their endeavors to develop best practice have significantly improved the observation of teaching and learning and self-assessment process. Work practices at MTL have been refined and are highly effective. (Ofsted report on MTL 2009)

Forming a PRD group in a competitive environment

Mode is a member of the Merseyside Hairdressing Forum (MHF), a peer review and development (PRD) group of six hairdressing providers; Training Plus Merseyside, Michael John of Liverpool. Herbert of Liverpool, Mode Training, Andrew Collinge and Scientiam, who formed as a PRD group in 2008.

The providers in the group work in close geographical proximity to each other, competing for learners and business contracts. The element of competition has provided challenges for the group, and working collaboratively was not easy in the beginning. However, the group implemented clear protocols from the outset and have worked to overcome these barriers. They now report that the benefits of working with close competitors outweigh the challenges:

- through close collaboration they recognise and have a clear understanding of each other's strengths, enabling each provider to create a specific niche within the market place
- providers share their knowledge, experience and contacts within the sector to hold collaborative development days and discuss future business developments, helping them strengthen their provision and navigate the economic downturn
- operating as a group of providers from the same sector and geographical area has seen them successfully bid for funding and initiative changes which they would not have realised as independent providers working in isolation

- a common focus allows them to realise cost savings through the sharing of cost effective, high quality, services e.g. web designers and photographers, and the provision of shared training for the group.

The focus of Peer Review and Collaborative Development

In the first year of PRD activity the group identified Teacher Observation as the main focus for review and in the second year they chose Leadership and Management as the key review theme. Teaching and Learning reviews were carried out through paired observations across the organisations. This process added to the skills set of the observers and their ability to be objective in their judgments; observing strangers in a foreign environment removed the tendency to make judgments based on prior knowledge of individuals. As a result of the observations, the group developed standardised processes and documentation to improve quality processes in all providers. They also gained a clear understanding of the strengths of the providers they worked with and set up collaborative development days to learn from each other.

The review of Leadership and Management was done through SAR validation. The members of the PRD group shared each other's SARs in pairs. Initially the competition between the organisations raised problems and tensions between members. This was partially overcome by introducing an 'external' party to deliver training on making and writing effective SAR judgments. The training was purchased by the group, allowing the members to benefit from high quality training at relatively low cost and providing them with common learning that they were able to refer to in their feedback to each other giving the review objectivity. Success in SAR reviewing was achieved by the hard work and determination of the providers not to give up and to work at developing open, honest and trusting relationships between themselves.

Realising the impacts: Mode Training

Mode Training went through their third Ofsted inspection on 9th October 2009. Each inspection has seen a significant improvement in their grades and their work within the PRD group has been a factor in achieving this.

The Teaching and Learning peer review at Mode increased the confidence and objectivity of observers. This, coupled with effective documentation, impressed the inspectors during their visit where they saw that staff were able to identify strengths and development areas within teaching and learning to a high degree of accuracy. These accurate observations were fed into an efficient quality improvement cycle and dealt with in the required way to ensure continuous improvements in the quality of provision offered to the learner.

The high quality SAR training gave the senior management a better understanding of what constituted a 'judgment statement' and this, coupled with their paired reviews, resulted in a more effective SAR.

Mode involved staff from across the organisation, as well as learners, at all stages of the improvement process and peer reviews. Thus everyone can articulate a clear understanding of the vision of the organisation, the achievements of the learners and the future developments and actions that will need to be undertaken to achieve a Grade 1 in the next inspection. This is a reflection of the improved quality and visibility of the organisation's improvement processes and procedures as a

result of working with other providers within the same sector, i.e. 'like working with like' has helped drive up standards, giving Mode a well deserved Grade 1 for capacity to improve.

Success Factors

- At the most senior level within the partner organisations there is a relentless drive to enhance quality with PRD at the core of quality review and collaborative development
- Members of the PRD group have a passion for what they do and a clear vision for the future of their organisations
- The learner experience is the key driver for quality improvement. Learner achievement is celebrated at every opportunity
- Members of the PRD group are scheduled in to the Ofsted visit to give feedback on the collaborative work they undertake

Feedback from PRD group members

'If only we had had peer review and development in the sector ten years ago...'