

Case study: Cambridge Regional College Managing vocational qualification reform

Background

Cambridge Regional College is a large general further education college, offering provision in all 15 sector subject areas to approximately 14,000 learners per year. In 2008 the college revised its mission to focus on employability and delivering economically valuable skills. This case study describes how the college approached managing the vocational reforms in support of its revised mission.

Raising awareness of the vocational qualification reform

Cambridge Regional College (CRC) first became aware of the vocational qualification reform through announcements by QCA and subsequently booked two senior staff onto a Qualification Reform Support Programme (QRSP) regional event in March 2008. The event explained the vocational reforms, gave updates on the transition from the National Qualification Framework (NQF) to the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), and encouraged delegates to consider the benefits and opportunities for their organisations. The Associate Principal for Learning and Curriculum Development and the Quality Manager attended the event, and decided that their next step would be to raise awareness within the college.

QRSP delivered an in-house workshop to 40 staff across the college in August 2008, which was tailored to the type of learners and employers serviced by the college. The event consisted of updates and a series of activities and discussions to help the college prepare for the implementation of the qualification reforms. The event was successful in increasing the level of awareness of the QCF amongst staff.

Following the in-house workshop, the Associate Principal for Learning & Curriculum Development and the Quality Manager decided to take part in a QRSP development project to help them move from awareness raising to implementing vocational reform. As part of the development project, the college used two days of support to explore implementation with senior staff, and focus on a single occupational area.

Development project

As part of the development project, a workshop was held for key staff who were identified as having responsibility to drive forward the implementation of the reforms. These included a mix of Heads of Academy, managers, the Vice Principal and Associate Principals. The workshop explored the changing role of Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), Sector Qualification Strategies (SQSs), and enhancing learner and employer responsiveness. The QRSP Readiness Matrix was used to support the college in planning its implementation of the QCF.

Moving from awareness raising to implementation

Staff identified the following issues in moving from awareness raising to implementation:

- Developing a communication strategy
- Mapping current provision against a QCF timeline
- The timely transfer of data within the college
- Target setting and recording
- Creating a staff development plan
- Keeping up-to-date
- Reviewing the employer engagement plan
- Getting updates from awarding organisations
- Seeking clarification on funding – current and future

At the end of the workshop, staff recorded individual actions that they felt they needed to take to prepare for implementing the reforms within their own areas of responsibility:

- Get updates on skills needs from SQSs
- Cascade the relevant information on the reforms to staff in each department
- Use the National Database of Accredited Qualifications to explore new QCF qualifications
- Compare the current curriculum offer with the new QCF provision and plan for changes in the 2009/10 academic year
- Review Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) to ensure a consistent message is given
- Model the costing impact of the reforms
- Investigate where there are shared and restricted QCF units
- Clarify which SSCs are linked to which college departments
- Consider the message to employers
- Work with partners and providers to consider opportunities to collaborate
- Develop a CPD plan for staff development
- Review arrangements for Quality Assurance
- Develop the tutorial process to reflect enhanced opportunities

Sustainable development

One of the ways in which Cambridge Regional College is starting to explore implementing the vocational qualification reform is through a project within the Sustainable Development department. In response to an emerging employer need, the college has developed training and assessment around modern methods of construction. This qualification is currently accredited onto the National Qualification Framework and the college is working with an awarding organisation to consider developing units or developing Rules of Combination to create qualifications to be accredited onto the QCF. The college considers the QCF as an opportunity to further develop its employer responsive provision, and to establish flexible qualifications in an area that has increasing interest as the construction industry looks for more sustainable solutions.

Evaluation of the development project

By taking a planned, strategic approach to the vocational reform and seeking support from the Qualification Reform Support Programme, Cambridge Regional College are well down the path to implementing the vocational reform.

Laurence Wells, the Associate Principal for Learning & Curriculum Development, comments that the project has been helpful:

Staff with responsibility to drive the implementation forward are now equipped to do so.”

Next steps

Cambridge Regional College is well placed to turn the opportunities of the vocational reform into real benefits for the learners and employers they serve. The college has taken a planned approach to support key staff to move from awareness of the reforms to planning their implementation. There are now a number of projects across the college that are helping the college gain experience implementing the vocational reform, including the work of the Sustainable Development department, and a pilot of the Foundation Learning Tier.

Further information

For further information on the Cambridge Regional College development project, please contact:

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