



JISC RSC Scotland South & West Case Study @ Motherwell College

Motherwell College - Focus Groups

Summary

The JISC RSC Scotland South & West was invited to follow up the results of a staff survey carried out during February 2009. Focus groups was the methodology chosen as they provide an opportunity to gain in-depth insights into particular issues and are a valuable means by which to collect detailed qualitative data.

RSC Staff carried out a series of 12 focus group sessions, 1 in each department, 2 with student groups and 1 with a school group. A report was published and returned to the college to support the decision making process and ensure that areas where there were issues could be better addressed.

About Motherwell College

Motherwell College is Lanarkshire's largest college, has more than 20,000 students and 800 staff. It offers a broad-based curriculum from pre-access to honours degree. It is a leading provider for courses in, automotive studies, computer aided draughting and design, performing arts and hospitality and professional cookery. The College moved to a new £70 million campus in August 2009.

The challenge

The aim of the focus group sessions was to complement annual surveys, probe further some of the responses and use an alternative model to expand the existing enquiry methods. As well as delving more deeply into certain areas, the aim was also to obtain an overall picture of the perceptions and views of staff and students about the current use of technology to deliver elements of courses. The results would help to inform how the college could continue to embed the use of technology within the curriculum and also to identify and enhance the support given to learners and staff. The outputs from the research would be used to inform the college's learning and teaching strategy.

The activity

12 Focus Group Sessions were conducted over a period of one week and covered the following topics:

Lecturers

- Extent of the use of technology for learning and teaching.
- Use of Blackboard VLE & its tools.
- Creation of materials.
- Use of e-assessment.
- Use of new technologies e.g. Web 2.0 / mobile technologies.
- Their preferences in terms of using technology for learning & teaching.
- Institutional factors affecting the use of e- Learning.

Support Staff

- Their role in supporting learners and how technology facilitates this.
- Extent of the use of technology to support learners.
- Use of new technologies e.g. Web 2.0 / mobile technologies.
- Their preferences in terms of using technology to support learners.
- Institutional factors affecting the use of technology.

Students – FE, HE and Schools

- Access to technology.
- Technologies used by lecturing staff, including Blackboard.
- Extent of the use of technology for teaching & learning.
- Use e-assessment.
- Use of new technologies e.g. Web 2.0 / mobile technologies.
- Their preferences in terms of using technology for learning.
- Comparison between the use of technology in school and college (for schools group only).

Following the sessions a report was prepared.

The outcomes

Undertaking the focus groups provided a complementary approach to gathering feedback on college provision and enhanced existing methods.

A report based on the 12 focus groups was prepared by the Regional Support Centre Scotland South & West to complement the annual staff and student surveys. The focus groups provided a mechanism for improving student, staff and support staff engagement in the evaluation of learning, teaching and support services.

It highlighted areas where there exists opportunities to enhance curriculum delivery and informed teaching & learning strategies and encouraged review of and reflection on current teaching practice.

The impact

Undertaking this process with the Regional Support Centre allowed us to review and re-focus our approach to innovative learning and the integration of ICT & learning and teaching strategies. This has resulted in an increase in the use of e-learning content, a substantial increase in VLE usage with a blended learning approach more widely adopted throughout the college. In addition there is a growth in the use of multimedia and a broader range of media in use e.g. digital images, sound & video.

A major impact is the increased use of Web 2.0 technologies for teaching & learning which enables staff to exploit existing skills that learners have and provide a curriculum that meets their expectations. This helps the college move some way towards providing a personalised learning experience, encouraging individualisation and self determined learning.

The timing of this exercise was critical for Motherwell College and meant that the feedback was useful in terms of providing practical solutions to be considered prior to the College's relocation itself. The exercise also allowed the College to prioritise staff CPD and provide a relevant and targeted staff development

programme which is tied into the curriculum portfolio. It also means that staff can build on previous training and develop their existing skills.

Lessons learnt

The process of conducting the focus groups acted as a stimulus for staff to concentrate on the quality of learning, teaching and assessment.

It impacted on the culture of the organisation in terms of improved open exchange and the process was enhanced by including both academic and support staff as well as a cross-section of learners in the exercise.

The exercise has also been of benefit in terms of informing and reviewing the staff and student surveys carried out each year.

Useful links

Resources for College Managers - www.rsc-sw-scotland.ac.uk/Management/Managment.htm

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