Supporting Teachers – You Bet!

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Abstract

Where is Western Institute in supporting teachers?

The restructure of July 2004 placed teachers at the centre of Western Institute operations. New positions were established in each faculty with the specific aim of providing educational leadership, guidance and mentoring to teachers. Seven Head Teachers were appointed to these Educational Leader positions. Clerical support was realigned to provide service directly to teaching sections.

Each faculty has a Faculty Business Coordinator and Administrator for supporting teachers involved in commercial activities and a designated faculty Finance Officer.

Annual faculty forums are the foundation of professional development for teachers and support staff. All staff from across the Institute attend a two day face to face workshop to share best practice and innovation. Faculty staff plan and organise the event with assistance from Organisational Improvement. One Class Preparation Assistant recently enthusiastically exclaimed “I rarely get the chance to go to staff development but this forum has been the best thing I have ever attended”. Librarians have developed successful strategies to support teachers with their information needs.

Twelve months on, the model is successfully embedded into everyday practice.

What impact has it had?

- More direct educational support available to teachers and Head Teachers reducing the gap between management and teaching practice
- More clerical support available to teachers and Head Teachers
- Instigating and managing commercial activities and budgets is well supported
- Renewed focus on building strong work teams through facilitated faculty management group meetings for Head Teachers and faculty forums for all educational and support staff
- Teachers are better informed and supported
- More support available for Directors, Educational Delivery to effectively manage their faculty
What specifically has been successful?

- Removing the division between education and administration by aligning administration and clerical support to faculties
- Direct provision of support to teaching sections
- Recognition of teachers as the living centre of all Institute activity

What lessons can be learnt by other Institutes?

- Other Institutes can learn from our experiences how educational leadership is working through the new positions, and how teachers are being supported by management
- Western Institute covers an enormous territory (equivalent to Sydney to Brisbane). If we can build a strong team based culture that values teachers any Institute can!
Introduction

Western Institute is geographically the largest TAFE NSW Institute, stretching from Lithgow to Broken Hill – a distance equivalent to Sydney - Brisbane or Sydney - Melbourne. With twenty five campuses spread across Western NSW we provide education and training services to just 5% of the population of NSW.

Western Institute, over the last five years, has recognised the importance of supporting teachers and Head Teachers. Professional development programs have continuously been offered to all teaching staff. In 2000 a full time project officer position was created in the Organisational Improvement Team specifically to support head teachers. Over the following three years, the Head Educators Life Line Opportunities Program (HELLO) was developed and embedded into the support network.

The HELLO program comprised:
1. a mentoring program for new head teachers
2. professional development programs to provide skills in management and leadership
3. annual head teacher forum which provided a networking opportunity for head teachers to meet inter faculty

This model of support was accepted and working well.

Recent drivers of change exerting pressure on Institutes have been the Schofield Review, DET Lifelong Learning and Shared Corporate Services initiatives, and a reduction in core ASH targets. In the face of increasing demands to work more efficiently, Western Institute took action. An internal change project was commissioned to find the “Best Way Forward”, with Donna Galvin as Project Manager. Collaborative input was sought from all stakeholders, providing the project team with 58 submissions. Solutions considered included six new structures for the Institute and 52 process improvement opportunities such as decreasing travel to meetings by using videoconferencing technology and streamlining course information using a web based system. The overwhelming theme in all submissions or proposed solutions was to keep the focus on teaching and provide support to allow teachers to meet the needs of our customers. The final solution adopted was to restructure internally, which occurred in July 2004.

Western Institute has reshaped, placing teachers at the centre of Institute operations, with support structures realigned.

Faculties were realigned to the Curriculum Centres, involving merges, and Directors of Educational Delivery were appointed. New positions were established in each faulty with the specific aim of providing educational leadership, guidance and mentoring to teachers, based on the success of the HELLO program. Seven Head Teachers were appointed to these Educational Leader positions, allowing a career path. Clerical support was realigned to provide service directly to teaching sections (see model following)
Each faculty has a Faculty Business Coordinator and Administrator for supporting teachers involved in commercial activities and a designated faculty Finance Officer from the Finance Unit to assist with managing budgets.

Librarians have developed successful strategies to support teachers with their information needs, and are always willing to secure resources for students. They conduct student orientation sessions, demonstrating the use of technology in the knowledge era.

Key themes

Challenges and Supports for Head Teachers

For Cherylee Shapter, Head Teacher Administration Services, Orange Campus, the challenges of working in a new team within a larger merged faculty have been numerous. The benefits are also tangible, as seen in the current Enterprise Learning project. Teachers from Administration Services, Information Technology, Digital Arts and Media and Fine Arts are collaborating to share expertise across all disciplines.

The new model of educational support tied to sections has seen clerical support hours increased from 3 hours to 2.5 days per week for Administration Services in Orange. Not only does this improve customer service to students, but also increases ownership and teamwork between staff.

Support services for learners with special needs are provided by the network of Teacher Consultants for students with disabilities and Counsellors. Regional Aboriginal Coordinators support Aboriginal students, and are especially helpful to teachers in more remote locations.

Communication and Information

Faculty Forums are an excellent way of sharing information, best practice and innovation as well as providing opportunities for teaching staff to network, increasing teamwork and
collegiality. Faculties hold their 2 day forum in Term 2 with faculty staff from all classifications invited to participate. 50 – 80 staff usually attend, depending on the size of the faculty, for educational workshops, guest speakers and seriously fun activities.

Faculty management team meetings are incorporating videoconferencing to reduce travel and increase participation.

Collaboration

In his role as Educational Leader for Access and General Education Programs, Mark Primmer works collaboratively with the Director Educational Delivery on strategic decision making and planning. He directly supports teachers to make the cultural shifts necessary towards innovation and the use of Information and Communication Technologies in delivery. Leadership of projects and initiatives such as Validation of Assessment, development of a faculty intranet site and sharing resources have been successful. Mentoring and supporting teaching sections through regular face to face visits, videoconference meetings and weekly phone calls are part of the job. The role is growing and emerging differently to match each faculty’s requirements, and is very satisfying.

Professional Development

Teacher education programs and annual faculty forums are the foundation of professional development for teachers. Faculty staff plan and organise the forum with assistance from Organisational Improvement. One Class Preparation Assistant recently enthusiastically exclaimed “I rarely get the chance to go to staff development but this forum has been the best thing I have ever attended”

Focussing on professional development for teachers in 2005/06 has seen the development of new programs to promote management and leadership. Western Institute has developed an entry level support program for part time teachers, which has six modules mapped to the new Certificate IV in Training and Assessment.

Change Management and Continuous Improvement

A review of the BEST Way Forward project is about to commence, allowing an opportunity to reflect on how the change process has worked. An online survey and focus groups will seek the opinions of staff at all levels.
Conclusion

Twelve months on the Institute model is successfully embedded into everyday practice. Evidence to support this comes from the recent observations by the AQTF and ISO auditors who were impressed with the overall structure, support and communication mechanisms in place. The ISO audit team were able to identify high level compliance against all the ISO standards, reinforcing the successful transition to a new structure without major systems or processes being adversely affected.

Other Institutes can learn from our experiences how educational leadership is working through the new positions, and how teachers are being supported by management. Specifically what is working well is

- removing the division between education and administration by aligning administration and clerical support to faculties
- direct provision of support to teaching sections
- recognition of teachers as the living centre of all Institute activity

By being diligent in responding to external drivers we were are able to put in place strategies to ensure Western Institute continues to be a place where people want to work and learn.