Hackney Community College Graded as a Good College (with a little help from eTrackr[ilp])

We talked to Ian Ashman (Principal) about the role that eTrackr[ilp] played in supporting their college's improvement journey

Hackney Community College is a medium-sized General Further Education college in London, providing a wide range of educational provision to the local community. Many learners begin their studies at the college from low starting points, with most learners coming from the 10% most disadvantaged wards in the country and approximately half the learners aged 16 to 19 join the college without a GCSE grade C or above in English and Mathematics[1].

Despite their challenging circumstances, Hackney Community College were inspected by Ofsted in October 2015 and received a Grade 2 rating ('Good') overall, improving on their Grade 3 ("Requires Improvement") rating in their March 2014 inspection. VLE Support spoke to **Ian Ashman**, the college Principal, **Sylvan Dewing**, the Assistant Principal and **Steve Hedges**, Head of Resource Based Learning to explore how eTrackr[ilp] has helped support their improvement journey.

Action Plans and Target Setting

Since the college purchased eTrackr[ilp] in 2013, one of the key areas of focus has been the use of Action Plans within eTrackr[ilp] to set targets for learners.

By the time of the inspection in March 2014, the college was beginning to benefit from eTrackr[ilp], but had not yet established consistency of approach within the college. Furthermore, the system made areas of inconsistency more visible, for example where Action Plans had been created but not completed.

As the college continued with their implementation of eTrackr[ilp], they developed processes for ensuring a consistent approach by all staff, taking advantage of the greater visibility of information facilitated by eTrackr[ilp]. Sylvan Dewing explains: "We could set very, very clear targets about how many targets a student should have and the nature of those and then use the management tools to assess that."

Using eTrackr[ilp]'s reporting functions, the management team were given a clear oversight as to how target setting was taking place; they were able to look at samples of Action Plans and provide further training and support to ensure that at least 80% of targets were 'SMART'. Additionally, the college tutorial staff were able to use the Progression Audit feature to regularly review the targets set with students.

Moreover, the latest Ofsted report comments: "Learners make good progress in their studies and most teachers carefully monitor learners' understanding and skills development." Sylvan Dewing believes that eTrackr[ilp] has 'definitely played a part' in improving student progress: "Setting targets, having traffic lights, the units and the bars - that does help. You know the learners better and track them better."

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[1] Source – Ofsted Inspection Report - Hackney Community College, October 2015

Bksb integration

One noteworthy achievement in the recent report was achieving Grade 2 in the report category 'Outcomes for Learners'. Given the low level of qualifications held by a large proportion of learners when they enter the college, the ability to show the starting points of learners and the distance travelled was a key component in evidencing successful learner outcomes. The recently improved integration between eTrackr[ilp] and bksb skills tests has been a particularly useful tool in order to provide such evidence, with respect to English and Maths skills.

Hackney Community College have played a key role in driving forward the recent improvements in the integration with eTrackr[ilp] and bksb. VLE Support are a company keen to listen to and respond to their customer's needs, and are pleased that these developments have had such a positive impact at the college.

While the previous inspection report of March 2014 identified the use of students' starting points as an area of weakness, the recent report commented: "Assessment of learners' skills in English and mathematics at the start of their programme of study is very thorough".

Steve Hedges commented: "We are using the bksb integration a lot, particularly with regards to starting points and diagnostics and having the full ILP there means that Curriculum Staff have the same view that the English and Maths staff are getting and they can make sure they can take account of that information".

Learner Engagement

Another impressive comment made in the Inspection Report related to the attitudes of learners: "Learners have a positive attitude to learning. Much discussion by learners in class and around the college focuses on learning and improving the standard of their own and each other's work."

The senior management team believe that, as the use of eTrackr[ilp] has developed, a cultural change has taken place: learners are becoming more engaged now that target setting has been embedded at the centre of teaching and learning. Sylvan Dewing explains: "Learners have a better understanding of what they need to achieve and what they need to do to progress on to their chosen paths. It's to do with eTrackr[ilp], careers education and a number of other things…"

A key area in which learners engage with eTrackr[ilp] is through the monitoring of their Attendance and Punctuality. This is another area noted by the recent inspection report as having greatly improved: "Learners' attendance at college, their punctuality and readiness to learn – a weakness at the previous inspection – have improved dramatically; attendance is very high and punctuality is good."

Steve Hedges commented: "eTrackr[ilp] does have an impact because it's the one place learners can see their attendance and punctuality… It gives them an incentive to improve". This is seen as particularly valuable by students who need to achieve a certain threshold of attendance to receive bursary funding, as they can easily monitor their attendance data.

The college has also had success engaging learners in the My Profile feature of eTrackr[ilp]. During the Induction Process, learners complete My Profile, reflecting on their strengths and weaknesses, setting long-term career goals and stating their 'Intended Destination' once they finish their college courses.

This has enabled the college to make the most of the new Destinations functionality, running a report to compare the Actual Destinations with the Intended Destinations inputted in the My Profile screens.

Data Analysis

In recent years, eTrackr^{ilp} has strongly developed its reporting functions and the system now contains over 90 built-in reports.

The college have been able to use eTrackr^{ilp} reporting to determine their progress against targets set out on their 2014 Post-Inspection Action Plan. The recent Ofsted inspection report commented: "Managers make increasingly good use of data to help sharpen judgements and to determine progress against targets".

They have also used the eTrackr^{ilp} reporting functions for a number of other purposes, last year finding the reporting functions "very useful" when tackling the end-of-year auditing process. Equally, the fact that departmental managers can access the eTrackr^{ilp} reports allows them to monitor the performance of their staff, leading to a culture of healthy competition between departments and raising standards in the college overall.

Future priorities

Next year, the college intend to make SMART targets even more ambitious and will continue to improve English and Maths provision, supported by the eTrackr^{ilp} and bksb integration.

The college strategy will also focus on 'stretch and challenge' and differentiation. The new facilities in eTrackr^{ilp}, which improve the setting of individualised target grades and reviewing progress against these target grades, should prove very valuable in this process. Having recently introduced a new MIS system, the college will look to further strengthen their collection of students' prior qualifications, so that they can accurately measure the 'value added' in-year.

Additionally, VLE Support are keen to work with Hackney Community College and other customers to develop a facility to comprehensively track the enrichment activities (EEP) associated with Study Programmes. This development will build on the facilities that already exist in eTrackr^{ilp} to track Work Experience, whereby students able to log the hours completed and upload supporting evidence which is then verified by staff. We believe that this new development will further encourage students, through eTrackr^{ilp}, to engage with their learning journey and strengthen the culture of ambition and success within the college.

Jon Openshaw and Tim Lyth, VLE Support Limited – December 2015

With thanks to all at Hackney Community College.