

Case Study Two – Has the introduction of the HE & Professional Common Room had a positive effect on HE ethos at Darlington College?

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Twice a year Darlington College participates in a QDP questionnaire, nationally benchmarked across around 100 other similar institutions. This survey takes account of approximately half a million students and includes all HE students in college. One question asks students their perception of the statement ‘The college has an appropriate HE ethos.’ Historically, Darlington College has always performed poorly on this question, falling in quartile C or D. In response to this feedback, the college has established an HE Common Room in the HE Centre providing four computer terminals and a social area specifically for students. The HE & Professional Common Room is aimed at providing a more appropriate HE environment for these students to work in and provides an area for conducting research, discussion and working in a more adult and professional environment.

The overarching aim of this project was to investigate usage of the HE and Professional Common Room, and evaluate its impact upon student perception of the college’s HE ethos using the QDP survey question about HE ethos as a proxy for student satisfaction. 86 questionnaires were distributed to a convenience sample of HE students with 33 being completed and returned, representing a 38% return rate. Responses to these internal questionnaires were supplemented with QDP data gathered in both January and April 2017, illustrating perception of an HE ethos.

From the data it is suggested that HE ethos has improved, and is moving towards the national benchmark. However, this could not be linked in a robust way to the introduction of the Common Room. The internal questionnaire results did, however, reveal vital information regarding the usage of and student opinions on the Common Room, allowing the college to further enhance this facility in a manner to enhance student satisfaction.

Participating staff were able to reflect upon the process of conducting this research across the year and within their presentation of results also evaluated the CPD programme and made recommendations regarding its enhancement. As a result, this model of CPD is once again in use during the new academic year, with a larger number of staff involved and greater staff ownership over the coordination and facilitation of the days.