CfEM

Whole College Approach

Self-Assessment Task 2: Understanding Your College Starting Point

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Most colleges will already have in place some elements of a Whole College Approach (WCA) to mathematics and will be developing their WCA further from this position. Colleges will benefit from understanding their starting position and the implications for further development before making changes. By examining the current situation, including both systems and culture, colleges will be able to identify strengths that they can build on and areas of weakness that need to be addressed. An analysis of the starting position also helps colleges to plan an appropriate timescale and realistic interim goals for the organisational changes required to develop their WCA in mathematics.

This self-assessment task is also designed to help the group develop a better understanding of one another's perspectives and how they can use these collaboratively to analyse the root problems that they need to address. The task adds to the understanding of contextual features developed in SAT1 by focussing on eight features of college mathematics provision that emerged from previous research as important to consider for their impact on students' experiences.

Importantly, whereas the aims of Self-Assessment Task 1 (SAT1) were to reach agreement on information about the college, this self-assessment should surface different perspectives of the way in which the organisation operates. This is to be encouraged and used as a basis for understanding how multiple perspectives can offer a richer account of the college culture and processes.

The task focuses on aspects of mathematics provision identified from previous research where there was evidence of variation in the perceptions of staff with different roles that created tensions and/or affected implementation.

Aims

The main aims of this task are for WCA teams to:

- develop a multidimensional view of the current college climate and capacity for a WCA
- develop a better understanding of different perspectives and their value in multidimensional analysis
- further develop ways of working together within an open-minded, inquiring, and supportive culture.

As a result of the task, WCA teams should be able to:

- identify strengths and weaknesses in their existing WCA in mathematics
- understand the value of exploring multiple perspectives
- identify specific challenges in the college environment that are related to their identified problem or area for improvement.

Task

The first part of the Self-Assessment Task 2 (SAT2) activity is a questionnaire that each member of the WCA college team should complete independently. Their responses should reflect their own views, from their personal perspective, and should not be influenced by other staff or college expectations.

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The WCA team should then meet to discuss an anonymised summary of their responses. In the discussion, the team should take time to explore differences in the perspectives of team members and use these to identify potential issues. The results of the questionnaire and discussion should help the team identify strengths and weaknesses in their mathematics provision for consideration in further discussions and WCA action planning. The success of the task is dependent on obtaining honest responses to the questionnaire and the openness of individuals in the following discussion. All team members should be encouraged to share their views openly, regardless of their position in the organisation, so that different perspectives are understood.

Resources

A summary of responses to the questionnaire, anonymised if possible.

Discussion guide (for the meeting chair)

One person needs to lead the discussion. This person should ideally be an impartial facilitator from another area of the college. The responsibility of the discussion leader is to ensure that all members have opportunities to contribute, that all members are treated with respect, and that all contributions are valued. Building on SAT1, the discussion should enable WCA teams to better understand the value of multiple perspectives from members in different roles and how these can surface issues that might otherwise be overlooked.

1. If possible, a summary of the responses should be provided to inform the discussion. Allow a few minutes first for the team to look at the summary, and then ask each member of the team to comment on what they have noticed about the summary.

   It is likely that they will comment first on either
   - the range of different views evidenced for certain questions (either widely dispersed or showing a clear consensus) or
   - strengths or weaknesses evidenced by the responses.

   First, ask them about the strengths and weaknesses and why they think these have surfaced. These will be important to consider when planning for action later.

   Secondly, use the following questions to open up further discussion about the different views represented in the results.

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2. Ask the team to identify items where there is evidence of **similar views**. Discuss these briefly, one at a time.
   a. Why have team members rated the item this way? Encourage team members to share any experiences that have led to this view and their reasoning for this rating.
   b. If you asked other staff (e.g., in other areas of the college or different roles), would the answers be consistent? Why would you expect them to agree or disagree?
   c. Do the results suggest this area of the college mathematics provision is a strength or weakness? If this is a weakness, how high a priority might this be for the WCA action plan?

3. Ask the team to identify areas where there is evidence of **different views**. Explore them one at a time, starting with the questions with the most marked differences.
   a. What are the reasons for the different views of team members? Ask team members to explain their responses and the reasons for their ratings.
   b. Are different views due to misunderstanding, differences in personal experiences, being in different roles, because there are inconsistent practices across the college, or any other reasons?
   c. What underlying issues does this suggest?
   d. What might the team do next to explore this area further?

Next steps

Having explored the college context and starting point, the WCA team will now use Self-Assessment Task 3 to begin exploring the issues that may be affecting students' experiences of mathematics in more depth. This will include a consideration of the systems and processes being used in the college, along with issues concerning culture and behaviour.

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