

CfEM

Whole College Approach

Self-Assessment Task 1: Understanding Your Own College Context

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Organisations such as Further Education colleges are typically large and complex, with different structures, curriculum offers, and student cohorts. They may face similar problems, but the solutions that work well in one college context are not necessarily transferable to another. The college context matters.

As a first step towards the development of a Whole College Approach (WCA), it is important to understand the college context, including its affordances and constraints, so strategies can be developed that have the greatest chance of succeeding in that particular college with its unique combination of contextual factors.

This first self-assessment task enables a WCA team to agree on key features of the college and encourages them to consider how this knowledge frames what is possible for their WCA project. The self-assessment task is also designed to help the core WCA group understand one another's roles and begin working together.

The task focuses on features of college contexts that have been identified from previous research as important factors affecting the design and implementation of systems and processes for mathematics.

Aims

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

- Develop a shared understanding of the college context in which the WCA project will take place (including the sites, staffing, leadership arrangements, curriculum, timetabling, and course enrolment for mathematics).
- Appreciate the implications of this understanding for what might be possible in their WCA.
- Begin to develop ways of working together within an open-minded, inquiring, and supportive culture.

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

- Identify key features of their college context.
- Reflect on how the problem to be explored is situated and the contextual features that need to be considered.
- Recognise features of the college context that frame their identified problem or area for improvement and act as affordances or constraints in the change process.

Task

Self-Assessment Task 1 (SAT1) involves a team discussion of a set of questions about the college. The team should work on these in a face-to-face meeting that is chaired by one of the team members. The chair should encourage team members to share different ideas and to be open about not knowing. They should discuss the reasons for any differences and allow time for discussion of any interesting points that emerge. The task should take approximately one hour to complete.

Since individual WCA team members have different roles, it is not expected that everyone will be able to answer every question. Individual team members should try to give their view and provide estimates even when unsure, since this will help the team build a shared understanding of the working lives and perspectives of those with different roles in the college.

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By the end of the task, the team should have a good shared understanding of their college contextual information and why it might be important in relation to an initial WCA idea. The discussion should help surface differences in understanding and fill gaps for individuals.

Resources

The PowerPoint presentation provided.

Discussion guide (for meeting chair)

One person needs to lead the discussion. This does not necessarily need to be the most senior person present and ideally, it would 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. Team members should be encouraged to share their responses to the questions but may decline. The chair might direct questions to individuals initially to avoid one person dominating the discussion, but should allow everyone to share views after the individual has offered a response (which may be a guess). If and when the team is comfortable working together, some questions might be directed to individuals who are less likely to know the answer, since this will generate discussion and understanding of different roles and perspectives within the team.

Continue by showing and discussing the following slides in a similar way, one by one, using the prompts below if appropriate.

1. Start by showing the first slide. Ask one person for their 'best guess' at the answer. Ask other team members whether they agree or not and encourage them to share their ideas. Are there any differences between the responses? If so, ask the group why this has happened.

Please note that some of the questions will generate more interesting differences of knowledge or understanding, but this will vary by college. The chair should have considered in advance which questions might generate the most interesting discussion (see point 2 below).

Prompts:

- Are there any differences due to a misunderstanding of the terminology?
- Do any differences arise because the situation is difficult to describe?
- Do any differences reflect acceptable knowledge limitations resulting from the different roles of team members?

Also, note that for some questions, the college may not fit neatly into one of the categories on the slide. If so, how would colleagues describe the structure or process in their college?

2. For questions 7, 8, and 12, you might ask everyone except the Head of Maths (or equivalent position) to make a guess first before trying to establish the correct answer. This should generate some discussion and, as a result, a better understanding of the situation in which mathematics teachers and managers find themselves, as well as how it differs from vocational teaching and management.

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3. At the end of the questions, ask which questions WCA team members found the most difficult to answer and why.

Prompts:

- Were the questions difficult to answer because the college didn't fit the categories? If so, what does this tell us about the college?
 - Were the questions difficult to answer because of inconsistencies in practices at the college or a lack of clarity in what was expected?
 - Are there any indications of strengths or weaknesses in communication or collaboration at the college?
4. Following the discussion, the WCA team should complete an agreed-upon version of the answers and ensure each team member can access a copy for reference during the project. These answers may be recorded on the PowerPoint presentation or in a separate file for circulation.
5. If there is time, the group might consider how their answers could impact the proposed focus of their WCA. For example, are there elements of the college context that they will be unable to change and that will act as constraints? Are there areas where they see a timely opportunity for development?

Next steps

As you move onto Self-Assessment Task 2, you will investigate the way in which structures and processes that support mathematics provision in your college are currently working. You will view these from different perspectives and assess your starting point for the development of a WCA. The next step will be to complete a short individual survey and then use the results, in an anonymised form, to explore priorities that may need to be addressed.

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