

## *S7 Exchange Programme*

This document is designed to facilitate S7 Exchange arrangements between S7 College staff.

Exchange visits are a hugely informative and valuable exercise for all parties given proper preparation and due professionalism. Exchanges that have taken place have been providing an excellent platform on which to build closer collaborative links and on which to raise quality through sharing qualities.

This framework is designed to be a suggested format that might enable S7 staff to get best use from an S7 Exchange opportunity and is not meant to be entirely prescriptive as each Exchange will be different.

### **1) Identifying the Need - Starting, Struggling or Succeeding?**

If you are new to a role in College, have been doing it successfully for some time, or would just welcome a fresh take, the opportunity to have a look at how someone else tackles related issues to yours in a neighbouring institution can be a helpful catalyst to further improvement in your own performance and approach.

Throughout the S7 Colleges, staff are engaged in tackling broadly similar issues with broadly similar cohorts of students. If you have identified that the opportunity for a creative look at the issues you face would be a valuable development step, then an S7 Exchange opportunity may be for you.

An S7 Exchange is predicated on the understanding that learning is never just one-way in any situation. So an S7 Exchange looks to pair together two colleagues working within the S7 Colleges who would appreciate being given time to explore the detail of one another's roles and priorities, supporting that enquiry with evidence and data as appropriate to inform understanding.

### **2) Setting Up An Opportunity**

The S7 website at [www.s7colleges.com](http://www.s7colleges.com) should be your one-stop-shop for arranging an Exchange with an S7 colleague. Not unlike a dating agency, although probably less fun, there is a dedicated section of this site, called *Visits and Exchanges* for arranging an S7 Exchange, where you can key in the opportunity you are looking for and can specify preferred dates or days of the week and await a host partner 'match'. From that point onwards, your progress will be tracked from the site and you will receive email alerts to support that progress.

### **3) Setting the date/s**

These Exchange opportunities have been funded as two day visits - one for each of the pairing to visit the other. Planning dates well in advance to ensure that the day chosen is appropriate in terms of the schedules of both Colleges will be vital to a successful outcome.

The date chosen should be one when the host colleague has arranged cover for the majority of the day in order to spend time going through in detail the policies, procedures and learning experiences that his or her department or area offers that contribute to its success. It should also be a date on which a range of learning experiences are taking place within the department to provide a potential observation offer to the visiting S7 colleague. Once a date has been agreed: stick to it!

#### 4) Preparing Effectively

In order to make the most of the opportunity afforded by the Exchange, it would be best to be clear about precisely what issues the visiting colleague is hoping to discuss; what new ideas he or she would like to try out and what answers he or she is looking for to any current delivery problems.

In order to maximise the benefit from the Exchange, it would be sensible for the visiting department head to alert the host College well in advance to the type of data it would be useful to see. A baseline document ought to be the area's SAR and current Development Plan, which it might be useful to share ahead of the Exchange taking place. For cross-college roles, this might be quite complex to do with processes and procedures rather than just straight forward statistics.

In cross college areas there is likely to be greater emphasis on discussion with staff responsible for the activity, perusal of documents, assessment of resources and, in some cases, discussion with learners.

For a subject area, useful information might include the following:

- examination results, including trends in recent years and comparisons with other subjects in the college and with national data for similar colleges
- value added data
- learner retention rates, including comparisons with other subjects in the college
- information on progression of learners to further study or employment
- achievement of targets for example on attendance, punctuality, setting and return of work, completion of work by learners
- approaches to coursework delivery
- approaches to delivery of particular specification topics

#### 5) Establishing the Scope

Once contact has been made and a date and initial host has been established, then parameters need to be set for the scope of the Exchange through direct contact between both parties.

These boundaries won't be the same for all Exchanges, but questions ought to be discussed and considered in advance, such as, will the visiting S7 colleague:

- be privy to all telephone conversations, 1:1 meetings, larger meetings, discussions with students etc?
- be allowed to copy and take away policies, procedures, forms and other resources?
- be given copies of work schemes, lesson plans and other learning materials?
- be given visitor access to the College intranet / VLE and networked resources?
- be allowed unlimited access to relevant cross-College documentation?
- be given total freedom to chat with students and staff as the opportunity arises?

Obviously, the hope is that the visiting S7 colleague will be accorded this sort of access in order to gain maximum benefit from the visit, but it may not be possible in all cases.

#### 6) Drawing Up A Programme

Where there are issues of particular interest to a visiting colleague, for example library provision, embedding of ICT, admissions policies etc, it would be a good idea to plan a schedule for the Exchange to include coverage of these areas and to have a chance to talk to other staff in the college whose work might be of significance.

It may well be that some lesson observation is a priority for the visitor, in which case, this will need to be thought about and discussed in advance.

The following is a made-up outline programme. Real programmes will of course vary enormously in order to reflect the priorities of the visit:

<b>Example Exchange Programme</b>	
9.45	Arrival, coffee. Meet department host and team.
10.00	Tour of department resources and wider college resources where appropriate.
10.20	Interview with department host looking through schemes of work, delivery methods, success rates
11.00	Observation taster of two different lessons and levels with department team members.
11.30	Coffee with department team
11.45	Time with department host looking through student files, student handbooks, mark books, learning materials etc
12.45	Lunch with staff
1.30	Opportunity to chat with students from the department about their learning experiences.
1.45	Time with staff related to successful delivery outcomes e.g. learning support, IT support.
2.15	Further lesson observation or further time with department host including selecting / copying of materials to take away.
3.00	Final questions / queries with department host or visiting LRC resources etc
3.30	Depart

Obviously, this is by no means intended as a prescription, only as an indication of the level of detail it may be necessary to include in order to maximise the learning experience.

It may be that a particular college Principal or Senior Manager would also be a useful part of the visit programme if a particular initiative or success has required strong senior backing or funding.

When drawing up a programme, it is important to plan the time for writing notes and analysing and assessing information as it goes along, as there will be so much information received that it will be lost if there is no opportunity to write it down and reflect a little as the visit unfolds.

## 7) Making the most of the opportunity - Visiting Colleague

Whatever your prior knowledge of an institution or department area's successes, try to go with an entirely open-mind about what you might find and how other college's might approach things. Open-mindedness, open ears and open eyes are going to be the best tools for a successful Exchange along with an exhaustive list of questions.

It might also be the case that you are particularly interested in listening to learners talk about their experience of a scheme / process / innovation that you are interested in replicating in your own college. Again, advance preparation and negotiation with your host could perhaps result in an opportunity being found for you to talk through questions and ideas you have with learners.

**Discussion with learners** can provide important perspectives on many issues. It is key that arrangements for meetings with learners are settled when the programme for the Exchange is agreed. The issues to be explored should be identified in advance and might include learners':

- interest and enthusiasm for a given subject / project / process
- level of knowledge and understanding of their course / project / process
- the variety of their learning experiences and their view of the appropriateness of them
- the extent to which they feel their needs are identified and met
- the amount and nature of the work expected of them and the timeliness and value of the feedback they receive
- the availability, appropriateness and take-up of learning support
- access to and suitability of library and other learning resources

This is not an inspection, so obviously any questions you address to learners should be for the purposes of your own learning about how successful delivery methods are experienced from the learner's perspective.

## 8) Protocol Issues - Visiting Colleague

It goes without saying that during any visit you are a guest of the host institution with all the behaviour norms that go with that role. However tempting it might be to reflect on perceived elements of practice within a college, that is not within the remit of a guest, nor within the intended function of an S7 Exchange.

The success of such Exchanges and their continuation will rely on good, honest standards of professional courtesy being maintained by all parties.

## 9) Feeding Back - Visiting Colleague

It may be that host institutions would value some informal feedback from you about your findings and do invite a response from you. If this is the case, then it is of course appropriate to offer your findings as long as these are based purely on the evidence base you have seen and not on surmise or assumption.

In any event, some form of feedback to your S7 host colleague and to the Principal to thank them for their time and openness would be appropriate.

### **10) The Return Fixture**

Once one leg of the Exchange has been completed, then a date will need to be set for the return fixture and steps 2) - 9) above repeated for the colleague who initially hosted. The challenge is to complete the Exchange cycle within one academic year. This is not as easy as it sounds. Plan early to secure suitable dates and to complete the whole process!

### **11) Following Up**

With luck and good preparation, these Exchanges will prove hugely valuable and it may well be that both parties would like to maintain contact and swap ideas going forward: indeed, if there is a particular project that both parties would like support for, it would be well worth approaching S7 to see what further facilitation could be available.

A very brief follow-up analysis of your Exchange will be requested for your staff development records in the hope that we can establish this type of experience as a funding priority going forwards, based on its value to staff.

Wishing you a very successful experience with your S7 Exchange!