



AOSEC
Association of
South East Colleges

AOSEC Newsletter

JULY 2009

This has been an exciting year for AOSEC with the professional development networks continuing to grow.

One of the network strengths is the contribution of college staff, leading on a topic where their own college has a particular experience or specialism to share. This year the college input has totalled around 40 different staff speaking from across 25 colleges. AOSEC is most grateful to all the people who have presented at a meeting and contributed immeasurably to the value that staff place on events.

The merit of the networks also rests on the numbers of attendees, and this year we have seen an increase in registrations of 18% on last year. Additionally, we have held over 65 meetings in college locations across the South East from Milton Keynes to Brighton and Brockenhurst to Canterbury. We are grateful to everyone who has attended or hosted, making the events worthwhile. We believe that the combination of external speakers, college input, networking opportunities and chance to visit a number of college sites and their facilities around the region provides a forum that is valuable to all.

There are a variety of ways in which we hope to develop the networks further in 2009 / 10. Firstly, many of the groups already have established Chairs and benefit greatly from their wealth of experience and background in the FE sector. We plan to gradually instate Chairs in all the networks from across the full range of regional college expertise. Secondly, we aim to seek out the very best

practitioners from across the colleges, not just in the South East, but from other regions too, who can update staff on areas in which they excel.

Finally, we are making some changes to the networks that we offer in the new academic year. In particular we intend to set up a Vice Principals Adult Skills network – more on this below. We are also bringing back the Teacher Training network, which has proved popular in the two one-off events held this year. In addition, we have decided to run a couple of the groups, HE in FE and IT Managers, on an ad hoc basis outside the normal subscription networks, and we plan for these to be targeted at specific issues as they arise for staff in these areas. We are continuing to offer the Finance Directors and Clerks networks for free to all colleges who are members of the Association of Colleges.



Photo: Jan Edrich, AOSEC Chief Executive, with students from Sussex Downs College which hosted an AOSEC Hospitality & Tourism network meeting. The event was also an assessed unit for students studying the Hospitality Supervision BTEC National Diploma.

Key Themes from the Networks in 2009

The AOSEC networks have strived both to respond to changes in the FE landscape and to be at the forefront of developments within the sector. Below are some of the key themes emerging from networks since the start of this year:

Further Education's response to the recession has been one of the leading issues and the Business Development network, introduced last September, has led the way in providing support on the funding options available in the new economic climate and partnership working with Job Centre Plus. The group has also

looked at new arrangements for apprenticeships and the need to encourage employers to get on board.

Likewise, the **FE capital build** issue has been a permanent feature, with staff from almost every network reporting on the impact on their college. The Property Services network has met with LSC to discuss the situation and how best to ensure that the proposals for distributing the budget available is fair and equitable. This has been a topic also covered by the Finance Directors and the Media and Marketing group, who have had

the PR task of managing the developments in the local and national press.

The new **14 – 19 Diplomas** have been a major topic within the curriculum networks. Staff have heard from awarding bodies, sector skills councils, publishers of the new resources, as well as those colleges which have started delivery of the Diplomas in the last year. The practical experiences of managing local partnerships with schools, timetabling and recruitment issues have all been discussed and new ideas have emerged.

The **Foundation Learning Tier** has been addressed by a number of networks, with uncertainties still about how the final picture and progression pathways may look. However, a number of colleges have shared their experience on Entry to Employment and developing work experience opportunities for learners with learning difficulties and / or disabilities, which have shown how responsive FE colleges can be to learners' needs. Colleagues have also shared their innovative approaches towards personalised learning and the development and recording of individual curriculums.

"Useful sessions, good networking, AOSEC provides a good forum" - Sarah Reed, South Downs College.

One change that will affect almost all staff working in colleges is the introduction of the **Vetting and Barring Scheme** for people who work with children and vulnerable adults, which the Independent Safeguarding Authority will be administering from later this year. Whilst this may lead to a few initial teething problems, the plans to increase the safety of college learners is welcomed, and this issue has been addressed by the HR Management and Staff Development network and the Learner Support Services network.

Child protection has become a larger issue for the education

sector generally with colleges that have been through inspection recently reporting a much closer scrutiny of their child protection arrangements. The Health and Social Care network in particular has reported difficulty recruiting into their sector in the wake of high profile media coverage.

The **Machinery of Government** changes which will introduce a new Skills Funding Agency for 19+ education, and transfer 16 - 19 commissioning to the Local Authorities, continues to be one of the major issues facing the sector. The new landscape will mean new ways of operating for colleges, with local partnership working becoming one of the key issues to ensure that the Every Child Matters agenda is successfully implemented. Many colleges report concerns about how they will manage to work with so many different Local Authorities, with the region's land-based colleges likely to be affected the most.

Energy efficiency continues to be a topic that pops up in a number of different forums. IT Managers have been to Cisco's offices to explore a number of useful technologies including the EnergyWise power-saving and reporting product, which could be used by the Property Services team within colleges. IT is seen as both part of the problem and the solution, and it will be interesting to see how this debate unfolds with

AoC taking a lead nationally to lobby the Government on this apolitical issue. Construction and Built Environment staff have also heard from awarding bodies about the inclusion of environmental considerations in the courses which they offer.

"Very interesting informative meeting - vast amounts of knowledge" - Stacie Smith, Canterbury College

IT is also integral to a number of other sector developments. There are excellent examples of colleges in the region using SharePoint and Moodle for their Virtual Learning Environments and staff have heard from colleagues who are incorporating this new collaborative form of learning into their website development. Elsewhere, Learning Resource Centre staff have seen demonstrations from two separate suppliers about the new e-book offerings available, which are increasingly transforming the way learners study and research.

The **Adult Advancement and Careers Service** is another significant development which will impact on colleges and there have been a variety of pilots in the region. The bottom-up partnership approach will mean that this service is rolled out differently in each locality, despite its universal remit.

New Vice Principals Adult Skills Network

AOSEC is always looking to update its offer of professional development networks and this Autumn sees the launch of the new Vice Principals Adult Skills network. This network is designed to help colleges deal with the specific developments in post-19 education and skills which are coming as a result of the new Skills Funding Agency. Adult

Learning is already seeing a tightening of its budget and this network will help college staff adapt to the tougher funding environment ahead. It should also help members maximise their potential using adult learner responsive funding and deal with the new challenges brought about by the recession.

Please notify Lisa Mullock (lisamullock@aosec.org.uk) if you or a colleague have responsibility for this area and would like to receive further information on the network and its first meeting. Alternatively, please forward this information to others within your college who may be interested.

If you have any comments on this newsletter, please contact:
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