

Issue 5
October 2014



DUDLEY **Insight**

THE MANAGEMENT OF STUDENT ATTENDANCE



This is one of a series of papers aimed at providing our stakeholders, both internal and external, with up-to-the-minute information on how we are strategically responding to local and national challenges. The papers may be of interest to many relevant stakeholders including parents, employers and the Local Enterprise Partnership.

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thinking
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Student attendance at the college has been steadily improving; significantly so during 2013-14. This paper explains the steps taken to achieve this, and the role that parents/guardians/employers can play in ensuring that the improvement trend continues.

2 CONTEXT

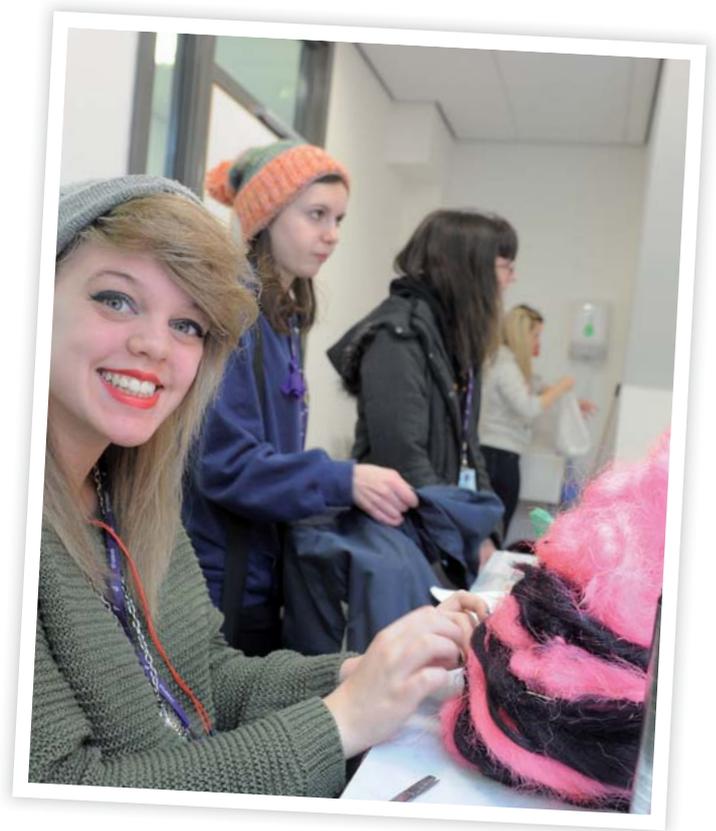
2.1 As far back as 2008 the college had a plan for improving attendance and retention, and some processes in place to identify and support students at risk of failing/leaving their programme early. This plan was further developed during 2009, through a range of initiatives including wide consultation, working parties, examining existing good practice within the college and researching successful projects and systems in 'outstanding' colleges. The result of this work led to the implementation of a 'retention strategy', at the centre of which is a 'zero tolerance' approach to absenteeism.

3 THE CURRENT CHALLENGE

3.1 Raising the level of student attendance at all timetabled classes is a continuous challenge. In respect of 16-18 year olds, they do not always see the importance of attendance at all elements of the newly introduced Programmes of Study, particularly functional skills/English/maths. Similarly, attendance of adults can be affected by work commitments, childcare issues and the like.

3.2 "Currently, no national measures of attendance rates at FE colleges exist, unlike for schools, where data collected on absences allow for the calculation of national and regional averages. FE colleges, therefore, are unable to compare their attendance data with those of their statistical neighbours. Varying ways of measuring it, as well as the increasing use of remotely accessible learning (that is, learning that does not require learners' physical attendance at college), compound these difficulties. Ofsted regularly comments on low attendance and punctuality as an area for improvement in college inspections, but little is currently known about the impact of poor attendance on attainment".*

* Improving attendance and punctuality: an AoC/Ofsted action learning project, October 2013, No. 130212, p5



“Overall attendance of full time students, both young people and adults, improved significantly in 2013-14. This is due to the rigorous implementation of the college’s attendance strategy.”





4 OUR RESPONSE

4.1 The college makes it clear to all college based students, through induction presentations held by the Principal, that we exist to prepare them for working life and therefore have the same expectations of students as any large, professional organisation would have of its employees.

4.2 This expectation is encapsulated in the 'Dudley Essentials' guide, in which students are reminded that attendance is required at all timetabled classes; that any absence must be reported to a personal tutor no later than 8.45 am on each day of absence and that a written explanation and doctor's note is required for absences of 3 consecutive days or more.

4.3 All college-based students sign a 'Code of Conduct' which clearly states that they agree to attend all lessons and arrive punctually.

4.4 The professional teaching standards, as outlined in the 'Guide to Teaching at Dudley College' are explicit in the requirement for teachers to manage attendance/punctuality effectively.

4.5 All teachers are aware of, and readily follow an absence/attendance management procedure. This procedure involves sending a text message to students expressing our concern regarding any non-attendance, with parents/guardians of under 18s being notified after the third or any subsequent absence. In respect

of employed students/apprentices under the age of 18, employers are contacted after a third or any subsequent absence. After a third unexplained absence, a 'Notice of Concern' is generated and the personal tutor invokes the stage 1 disciplinary process as necessary. Support as appropriate is offered to students in this situation; however, persistent subsequent non-attendance can result in a student being taken to stage 3 disciplinary action, which may result in a panel recommendation for exclusion.

4.6 All personal tutors work with students at the beginning of their programme to set SMART targets, giving students early indicators of expected progress and predicted attainment, perceived to be motivational factors for students and thereby having a positive impact on attendance.

4.7 The annual 'Freshers' Fayre' and early group tutorials help students to create and develop relationships early on which in turn provide positive peer-to-peer support and encourages attendance.

4.8 The college introduced a 'non-attendance not acceptable' message (NANA) in 2012/13. This was a light hearted approach to the serious issue of attendance and very carefully makes the point to students of the direct correlation between attendance and achievement.

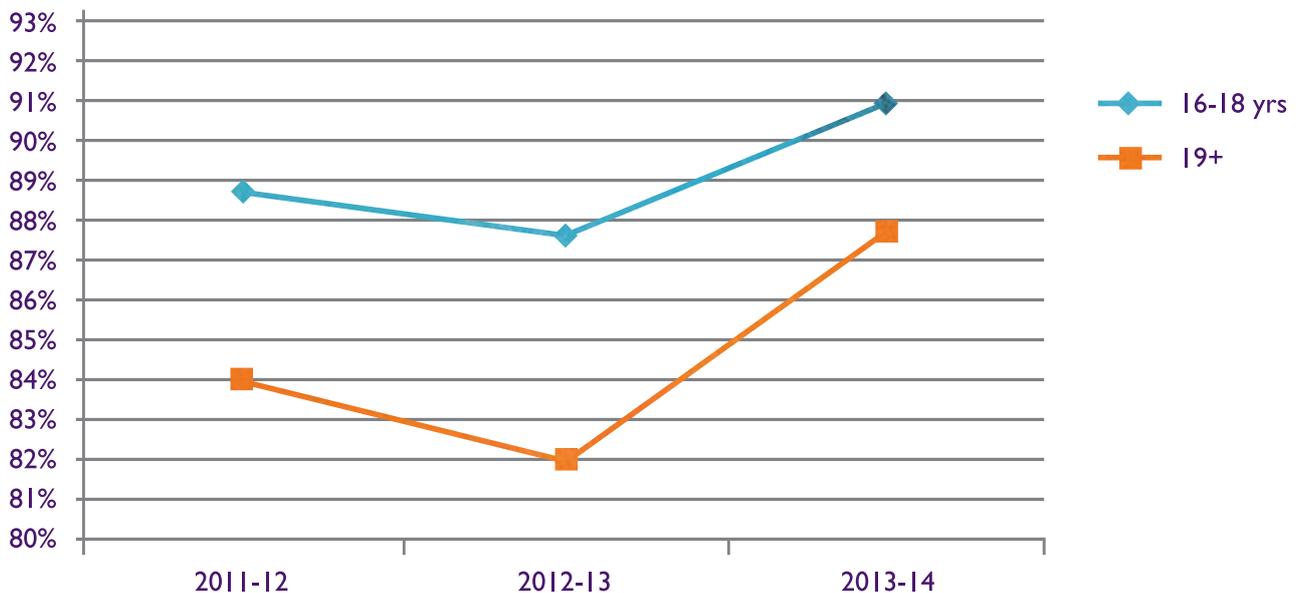
5 PROGRESS TO DATE

5.1 Many staff (310) have attended training over the last 3 years on how to effectively manage challenging behaviour, which we are confident has contributed to the improvement of staff's abilities to manage student punctuality and attendance.

5.2 Overall attendance of full time students, both young people and adults, improved significantly in 2013-14. This is due to the rigorous implementation of the college's attendance strategy, see graph below:



Attendance (CBL) - 3 years trends



6 NEXT STEPS

6.1 The college is committed to maintaining the now high levels of attendance through the continued implementation of the strategies outlined above.

If you would like to receive any further information on the management of student attendance at Dudley College, such as the retention strategy, the NANA message or the absence/attendance management procedure please contact:

Hilary Jakovlevs
Executive Director of Standards and Learning
The Broadway
Dudley
DY1 4AS
Email: hilary.jakovlevs@dudleycol.ac.uk
Tel: 01384 363494

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