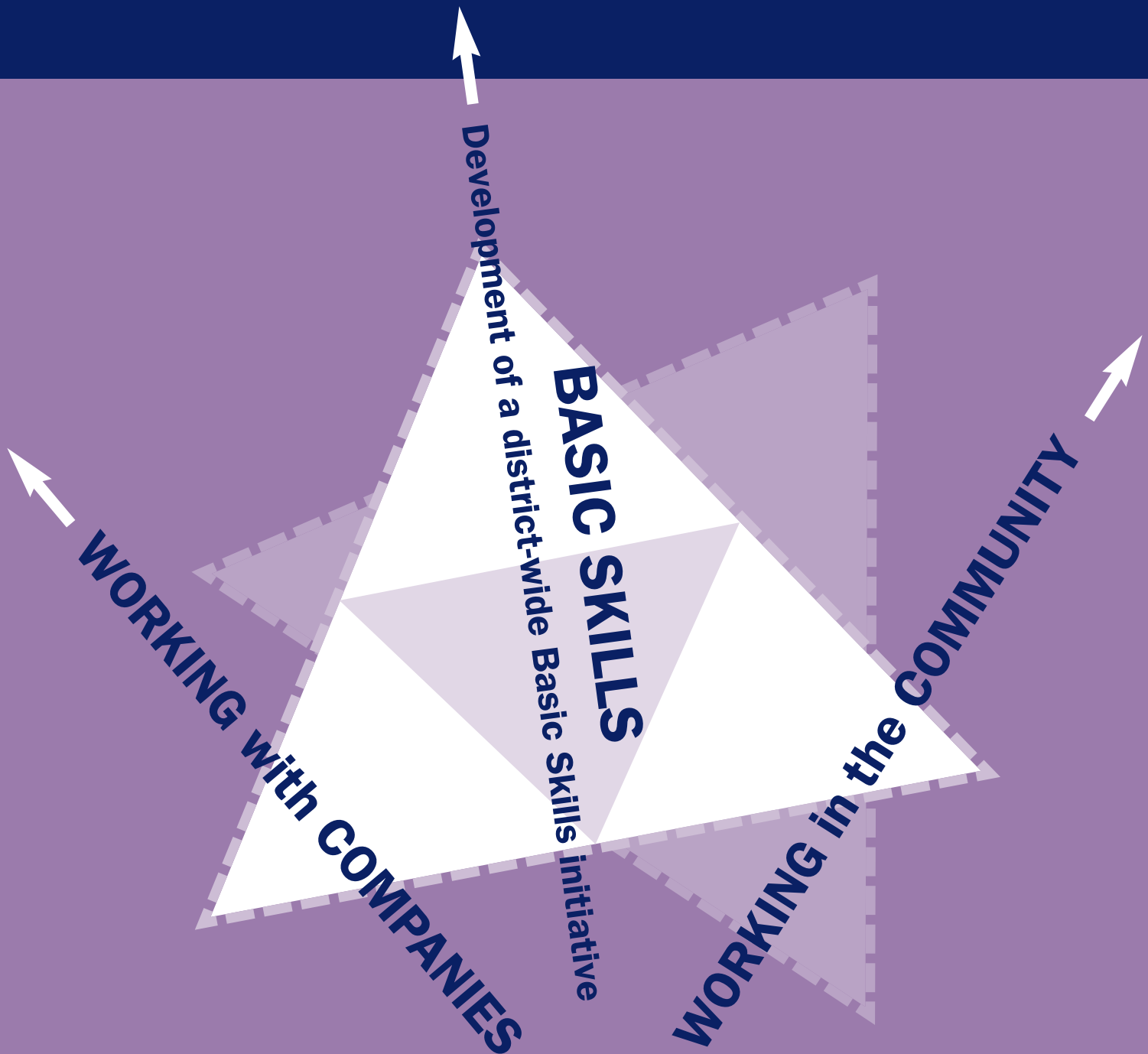


# good governance & management at Thanet College



# basic skills – development of a district-wide basic skills initiative

## INTRODUCTION

The FEFC Inspection of Thanet College in May 1998 assessed College Governance and Management as Grade 1 outstanding provision, which has many strengths and few weaknesses.

The College has been successful in bidding for resources under Category 5 of the Standards Fund to develop a series of information packs as a contribution to sharing ‘good practice’ with other further education colleges in Kent. This is the second series we have produced. We are pleased to take this opportunity.

Our aim has been to produce material which conveys the overall nature and character of the approach we follow at Thanet College without in any sense wishing to produce an A to Z guide. Our intention has been to make the packs useful, practical and supportive of colleagues in Kent who believe there is a need to review their approach to aspects of governance and management.

The units in this pack cover the following:

- Basic Skills – Development of a District-wide Basic Skills Initiative
- Working in the Community
- Working with Companies

## DEFINITION OF BASIC SKILLS

Basic Skills relates to functional literacy and numeracy – the ability to read, write and speak in English and to use Mathematics at a level necessary to function at work and in society in general. It is estimated that 1 in 5 adults (i.e. 7 million adults in England, 10,000 in Thanet) has less literacy than that expected of an 11 year old. The situation for numeracy is both worse and more confusing because the numeracy tests are less reliable than literacy tests and therefore the evidence is more controversial. The National Working Group regards 40% (14 million adults in England) as a more realistic figure of those who have some numeracy problems and who function below the level expected of an 11 year old.

## CONTEXT

Thanet is, geographically, relatively isolated on the north east coast of Kent; it has a population of approximately 130,000. It was one of the first areas in the South East region to obtain Objective 2 status within the framework of the National Regeneration programme and has obtained significant regional aid. This reflects the extent of the level of poverty and need in the Thanet district, which is recognised as having the highest levels of deprivation in Kent based upon a range of measures which include levels of low income, unemployment and poor housing conditions. There are very few large employers and a preponderance of small companies which affects significantly the approach undertaken to training in the workplace.



Thanet College has established an effective working relationship with Thanet District Council and other partners in both the statutory and voluntary sectors. It is well represented in groups and provides leadership in the management and direction of projects which make up the district's regeneration programme.

### **THE ROLE OF CONSULTANCY IN DEVELOPING BASIC SKILLS OPPORTUNITIES**

In February 1999 the Basic Skills Agency was commissioned by Thanet District Council's Regeneration Unit to review existing provision and arrangements for supporting basic skills achievement in the Thanet area with a particular focus upon nine community economic development wards. The Agency was asked to make recommendations on how to make best use of existing and future regeneration resources to promote the development of basic skills in the area.

The Basic Skills Agency was asked to comment specifically on the following:

- What is the nature and extent of existing collaboration on developing basic skills learning opportunities between organisations providing complementary services?
- What is the potential for developing a more coherent strategy for securing basic skills improvements in the area?
- How best can multi-agency working be developed so that existing capacity can offer better opportunities to those of the population of Thanet who have low-level basic skills?
- Which models of effective practice should be considered within the overall basic skills achievement strategy to improve significantly basic skills levels in the area? How best can additional resources be targeted?
- What are suitably challenging but achievable targets for basic skills improvements in the Thanet area?

During the period of the consultancy contact was made with a wide range of people representing many of the key stakeholders in the Thanet district.

### **FINDINGS**

The Basic Skills Agency found a general lack of information on what works best for different groups with basic skills needs. This was the case for all phases and sectors. They found a general agreement that raising standards of basic skills should be at the heart of Thanet's regeneration initiative and anti-poverty strategies. They recommended the development of a coordinated, 'cradle to grave' approach to the provision of basic skills opportunities focussing upon the wards of the area with the highest level of deprivation.

#### ● **Report of the National Working Party (The Moser Report)**

The report of the National Working Party chaired by Sir Claus Moser 'Improving Literacy and Numeracy – a fresh start' was published in early 1999. It highlighted the extent of the basic skills needs of the adult population in this country and made a set of recommendations for



action at the national level. This report gave an added significance and momentum to the Thanet Basic Skills Project.

#### ● Preparation of the Way Forward

Thanet District Council's Single Regeneration team sought the views of a range of partners who all confirmed a commitment to supporting a drive to improve the basic skills opportunities in the area based upon the findings and recommendations of the Basic Skills Agency

A consultant based locally was then commissioned to help establish and launch a draft basic skills strategy for Thanet under the direction of a newly formed Basic Skills Steering Group. An overarching draft basic skills strategy was developed with the help of the consultant.

#### ● Basic Skills Strategy for Thanet

From its inception the draft basic skills strategy was target driven and had the long-term aim to drive up the quality, quantity and effectiveness of provision of basic skills. The strategy is characterised by:

- Having clear aims and objectives
- Developing community involvement and commitment to raising basic skills with a particular focus on lifelong learning
- Ensuring the coordination of existing and future core provision
- Promoting the development of an innovative multi-agency approach in basic skills provision
- Setting quality assurance standards for the full range of its activity
- Defining evaluation and dissemination strategies
- Ensuring the achievement of measurable basic skills targets for the Thanet area

Arrangements were put in place to appoint a full time Basic Skills Project Director who would have lead responsibility for developing and implementing the strategy. The post was advertised nationally but after a disappointing response the Steering Group decided to improve the salary and readvertise reaffirming their commitment to the appointment of a full-time Project Manager with the skills and abilities to lead the project successfully and win the confidence of a wide range of partners, particularly at agency and community level. The readvertisement produced a stronger field of applicants and a Project Director was appointed with a strong track record in further and community education.

#### ● Basic Skills Steering Group

The Thanet Basic Skills Steering Group has a broad based senior representation from different stakeholder interests across the district. The Principal of Thanet College has chaired the group from its inception.



The role of the group is to:

- Provide overall direction in the development, coordination and implementation of the basic skills strategic plan for Thanet
- Promote raising attainment, lifelong learning and social inclusion as part of the wider regeneration activity in the Thanet area
- Ensure the coherence of existing and future core provision by discrete organisations
- Promote the development of innovative multi-agency working by increasing basic skills opportunities and take-up
- Ensure the programme of basic skills is informed by sound evaluation and research methodologies leading to a long-term sustainable programme

The Project Director was appointed in April 2000 and is accountable to the Thanet Basic Skills Project Steering Group reporting to them on a regular basis. This group reflects the collective responsibility and broad stakeholder support for the project. Thanet College acts as the employer and the College Principal is responsible for the operational line management of the post. The legal entity which receives and manages the project's funding is Thanet College. The Project Steering Group is not a legal entity and therefore is unable to fulfil this role.

#### ● Launch Seminar

The launch seminar involved over 100 delegates from many sectors and organisations both locally and from a wider area. The keynote speaker was Alan Wells, Chief Executive of the Basic Skills Agency, and other colleagues from Derbyshire and Norfolk shared their own good practice. The draft basic skills strategy for Thanet was presented to the launch and a consultation process followed resulting in the production of the final strategy, which is included in this pack. The opportunity was taken to obtain some positive publicity in the local media and also to introduce the newly appointed Project Director which enabled her to begin to build some important working relationships with a range of partners. The feedback from the launch seminar was most encouraging and confirmed a broad agreement with the vision and the commitment of the Steering Group.

#### ● Funding

The Project has acquired funding to September 2002 from the Single Regeneration Budget for Thanet as a surround to the core budget for basic skills provision and development in the area. By far the largest part of this budget is contributed through core funding drawn down by Thanet College as the main provider of further education in the area although other funding streams have been accessed including the Single Regeneration Budget, European Social Fund, South East Region Development Agency and Pathfinder Fund.

### **CORE PRINCIPLES OF THE THANET DISTRICT APPROACH TO BASIC SKILLS**

- A recognition of the right of all individuals to have opportunities to develop their skills in literacy and numeracy in settings which are appropriate to the individual



- Establishing a range of opportunities for learning, the majority of which are likely to be community based and not delivered in conventional further education settings
- The role of basic skills opportunities as a key component of a district based programme of regeneration activities
- Placing the widening of participation at the centre of the strategy through an appreciation of the need for people to feel valued and to have a positive influence upon the world in which they live
- Placing quality standards at the heart of the provision which then relates to a professional development and qualification framework which ensures the staff who teach basic skills are well qualified and suited to the role
- Making good use of evaluation methodology to develop what works well and to reject or modify approaches which are less successful
- A long-term programme is required which recognises the scale and nature of the challenge which cannot be achieved in a short time frame

#### **KEY FEATURES OF THE THANET APPROACH TO DEVELOPING BASIC SKILLS OPPORTUNITIES**

- That regeneration budgets should put a surround to core provision and not be a substitute for core funding
- An overarching basic skills strategy functions as a coherent framework for supporting different phases and sectors
- A basic skills steering group gives direction to the strategy to support raising attainment, social inclusion and regeneration activity
- A full-time Project Director works with the partners on the steering group and is accountable to them for establishing and delivering a basic skills strategic plan for the Thanet District
- A flexible approach to the development of basic skills opportunities which aims to meet people where they are

#### **IMPACT UPON THANET COLLEGE**

- Thanet College provides the majority of the programme of basic skills opportunities both within the College and in the wider community
- The College is firmly committed to playing a major role in the development of high quality basic skills learning opportunities in the district and to supporting the Thanet Basic Skills Project – Skills for Success



- The College's nine year Strategic Plan includes a firm commitment to playing a major role in the development of basic skills opportunities in Thanet. The plan expresses a firm commitment and sets targets for developing basic skills opportunities
- A senior manager has a clear responsibility for the development of high quality basic skills opportunities across all college provision
- Training has been given a priority through the Initial Certificate in Teaching Basic Skills City and Guilds 9281 within its cross-staff development programme and a staged approach is underway to broaden the base of college staff who teach basic skills programmes within the College and also in the community
- Programmes are in place to offer extended support through a range of formats including outreach provision, drop-in workshops in the evenings and at weekends to provide an increasing number of part-time students with a basic skills assessment
- The outcomes of initial assessment are recorded and programmes are being developed to meet the identified basic skills needs of students
- Through the Inclusive Learning initiative curriculum modification is being developed to enable greater accessibility for learners
- Funding streams necessary to support the developing work of the College play a vital part in the delivery of quality outcomes

### **WIDER PARTNERSHIPS**

KCC Education and Libraries Directorate has given very strong support to the project through enhanced advisory support to the LEA's schools. A substantial number of Thanet schools are now obtaining the Basic Skills Agency Quality Mark as a result of the enhanced support plans which are in place to increase the number of participating schools over the next few years. The membership of the Skills for Success Project Steering Group reflects the broad based partnership which provides the underpinning support for the project. Representatives from the College, the District Council, the Health Authority, the County Council's Social Services, Education and Libraries and Adult Education sectors, and the East Kent Community Service are all members of the Steering Group.

The College's Strategic Plan places an emphasis upon widening participation in education and training for groups who are traditionally under-represented.

The College will continue to play a lead role in the provision of post-16 learning opportunities. Increasingly this is done in a context where the College is a partner with a range of agencies from the statutory, voluntary and private sector, all of whom have a commitment to creating and supporting opportunities for people to develop their learning even though this may not be their 'core business'. The networks that this has created have already made the challenge of widening participation one which is more readily achievable and have tapped into a wider range of skills and resources within the community.



**RECENT DEVELOPMENTS**

In recent months the project has been designated one of nine Pathfinder projects, one in each area of England plus one in a prison. DfEE sponsors the projects as part of the government's Skills for Life initiative. Thanet is the project for the South East of England. In the first stage of the Pathfinder, March-August 2001, the Project has been unrolling the new intensive training for adult numeracy and literacy tests.

In the second stage of the Pathfinder, September 2001 to March 2002, the Pathfinder will involve incentives for students and employees and different ways of teaching basic skills all of which will be tested and evaluated.

**SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS**

Thanet Basic Skills Project Strategic Plan 2000-2005

**YOUR RESPONSE TO THIS PACK**

Our commitment is to respond to colleges who may wish to pursue an interest with us in using any of our ideas or information.

We are continually reviewing and modifying our governance and management capability in the clear recognition of its value in achieving better outcomes in college performance and effectiveness. Should you wish to comment upon the information contained in the pack we would be pleased to hear from you. Contact either Bryan Mitchell project coordinator or Caroline Hayward on 01843 605000 or Email: [principal@thanet.ac.uk](mailto:principal@thanet.ac.uk)

