



# The **matrix** Excellence Awards 2008

# Case Study

## Kingston College



### A unified approach to quality

*A **matrix** Excellence Award was presented to this college for its outstanding use of the **matrix** Journey as a lever for strategic, cultural and operational change. In removing internal divisions to become one unified team, it achieved widespread improvements resulting in a tangible organisation-wide focus on the learner.*

Kingston College, based in Kingston upon Thames, South London, is a general Further Education (FE) college serving in the region of 11,000 students including full-time, part-time and Higher Education.

The college is structured into five academic faculties that are complimented by a range of cross-college services. All areas across the college are involved in providing some form of information, advice and guidance (IAG).

The college operates in a diverse environment. Students in the South of London have great choice in terms of educational establishments and travel to study is the norm, because of good transport links. Against this backdrop, IAG plays a pivotal role in attracting, supporting and retaining learners.

The college had originally achieved **matrix** Accreditation purely for its careers service for adult learners in 2003, covering the work of just three staff. It then went on to extend Accreditation to include its six key client-facing functions, taking a 'building-block' approach. Although this had an impact on the client facing services, good practice was at times still patchy when cascaded through to faculties and curriculum areas.

### Company Info...

**Organisation:** Kingston College

**Sector:** Further Education/Higher Education

**Accredited for:** External services

**Nature of Service:** Information, advice and guidance AG on learning and work for young people and adults

**Accredited:** 2003, 2007 and 2008

In 2007, the college started looking at other ways to improve overall customer service and satisfaction, rather than just focusing on the IAG function – and the **matrix** Standard fitted the bill. The flexibility of the Standard enabled the college to 'think outside the box', using work towards the Accreditation to improve all aspects of the learner journey.

By 2008 it had fulfilled its strategic aim of achieving whole-college **matrix** Accreditation – a quite extraordinary achievement given the scale of the undertaking. Culturally, strategically and operationally, the organisation has embedded the ethos of the **matrix** Standard, with impressive results.

### Survival of the fittest

Ben Rowe, Director of Student Entitlement and Marketing, describes this latter phase of the **matrix** Journey: "Further Education colleges operate in a turbulent environment which requires them to be responsive to many different local and national drivers. As an institution we pride ourselves in how responsive we have been but at times this has led to a 'silo mentality' where people across the organisation were re-inventing systems and processes independently of each other. There was no central quality control of our IAG systems and we were aware that this had to change in order for us to achieve our strategic objectives."

Julia Rogerson, Information Services Manager, agrees: "Our customer service ethos had slipped and we were forgetting to close the loop in terms of some of our quality mechanisms."

*“The **matrix** Journey has refocused us on our core business, it’s been a compass to us and will leave a genuine legacy for the future of the entire college. Forget spending money on advertising – invest in **matrix**!”*

**Ben Rowe,**  
**Director of Student Entitlement**  
**and Marketing**



*“We chose the **matrix** Standard as a tool for cultural change. The framework is simple, the results are tangible and have a real impact on the whole organisation. It has created a phenomenal feel-good factor.”*

**Ben Rowe,**  
**Director of Student Entitlement**  
**and Marketing**

## Creating change agents

The first phase focused on getting all staff together from the five faculties, specifically focusing on faculty administrators. They undertook a thorough consultation process, using the **matrix** Standard elements as reference points to unpick core processes and practices.

This revealed operational improvements that could be made relatively easily, and gaps in knowledge that the teams could then address. Policy documents were revised, materials reviewed, and common standards and practices agreed. All the improvements were captured in a flow chart of the learner’s IAG journey, which was owned and understood by all.

“Faculty administrators used to feel undervalued, but this consultation helped them see that they are in fact central to the college’s success. These 35 staff then acted as agents of change in our ongoing improvement process,” explains Ben.

## Engagement across the board

The next major phase of development was to roll out the **matrix** Standard to over 400 tutors. Ben and the team took a faculty-by-faculty approach, explaining the vision for joining up the college in a centrally-coordinated IAG process. Again they used the **matrix** Standard as a framework to consult, and to seek input from curriculum staff on creating a shared standard of practice. As much of the IAG was being delivered by tutors, it was vital to gain their feedback on how to design more effective interventions in the newly-clarified learner journey.

“Suddenly people began to see that we could use the **matrix** Standard to help us design better systems without having to reinvent the wheel five times. During a six-month period, the application process, tutorial interviews and cross-college referrals became centralised and streamlined,” explains Ben.

## Efficient solutions

As functions and faculties began to work and communicate together as one overall team, improvements could then be made to aspects of the services that clients directly experienced. For example, they identified that during the application phase many students used to let themselves down at interview, but there was little support available to address this. So the team created a special guide for students which helps them prepare for interview, based on a pilot with over 150 students. This was then rolled out to over 12,000 prospective learners.

Meanwhile faculty staff were given training on delivering a clear, common standard for interviewing students, achieving consistency of advice and confidentiality. “Before, conversion rates from interview to enrolment varied across the college. The **matrix** Standard has improved application and conversion rates – helping us to be more effective and efficient,” comments Ben.

Further client-facing improvements included: a well resourced, brand new IAG Centre; and an Information Point focused specifically on entry and progression to programmes following GCSE and A-level results. This has proved hugely successful in attracting new learners and is also vital in supporting students at this critical time.

The college has also focused on its image and clarity of identity. This includes college-wide re-branding, with faculties as sub-brands in one clear, corporate style; and a revised approach to open days, focused on inspiring and empowering visitors with engaging and impartial IAG.

## Clear dividends

Strategically this fully integrated approach to IAG is also bearing fruit more widely. It has impacted on recruitment, retention, achievement and progression. The college has seen a 10% increase in success rates in the last three years, and was rated as Outstanding in terms of ‘Responsiveness to Learners’ as part of the pilot of the Framework for Excellence.

Julia explains: “Because we are much better now at surveying, tracking and seeking feedback, we have improved intelligence about issues the college needs to address. For the first time in our history we can genuinely say we are a learning organisation.”

Karen Spencer, Vice Principal, concludes: “The **matrix** Standard is extremely flexible, it fitted with our overall ethos for quality improvement and our journey to excellence. The Standard helped us reinforce our own core values (Access, Excellence, Individuals, Others and Unity) along with our strategic objectives.”

