

## Implementation of the CPD Framework case study

<b>Name of Institution:</b>	<b>Aston University</b>
<b>Title of Project:</b>	<b>Supporting administrative team restructure</b>
<b>Level:</b>	<b>Team</b>
<b>Date of Project:</b>	<b>October 2010 – July 2011 (first phase) (2<sup>nd</sup> phase to continue in 2012 with new project sponsor)</b>

### 1. The Project Brief

During the period September 2010 – June 2011 the administrative team of the School of Engineering and Applied Science (EAS) of Aston University underwent a dramatic period of change leading to a major restructure. A team of approximately 30 staff moved from a mainly devolved structure to a fully centralised team whilst also moving physically into a brand new 'School Centre' which had been designed specifically to accommodate the new team. During this same period, the University adopted a culture-change project called "Aston First" which was implemented in order to ensure that the institution was prepared for the difficult challenges that lie ahead in the sector. It was anticipated that the pilot project would help to ease the EAS administrative team through this challenging and difficult time and assist in the building of the team.

**The specific objectives that were set for the project were as follows:**

- staff are clear about what the organisation expects of them;
- more focused/structured Performance Development Review (PDR) discussions;
- improved 'customer' service;
- increased awareness of the bigger picture;
- taking an organisational view (Aston First).

### 2. Project Context

Aston University is a comparatively small institution with approximately 8,000 students housed in 4 Schools. EAS is one of these Schools and is made up of 6 subject groups. Prior to the restructuring exercise, the administrative team was spread across these 6 subject groups with a small central 'School' team undertaking a degree of centralised activity. However, the devolvement of the team led to many risks especially in the area of the student experience. The risk of staff absences, duplication of work and a general lack of a cohesive approach to student support were issues that had to be addressed. As a result, it was decided that a centralised approach would be taken in a move to increase efficiencies by removing duplication whilst also developing a 'one stop shop' approach to student support. In addition, it was intended that a staff structure be developed that would offer true career progression opportunities to the EAS administrative team. The activity of the team crossed the whole spectrum of administrative activity including student support, academic support, research support, partnerships, admissions, placement support, purchasing and marketing.

Alongside the EAS restructure was the Aston culture change initiative – “Aston First”. The five objectives of Aston First were defined as:

- Clear direction and inspiration from leaders
- Better teamwork and inter-departmental communication
- Excellent customer service with a 'can-do' attitude
- Fairness, equality, respect and well-being for all
- Innovation, cost saving and income generation - everybody's responsibility

‘Aston First’ was defined as one of the drivers of the EAS restructure – ie a recognition that the institution was changing and that EAS needed to complement and support that change. However, it was important that a synergy be found between the two projects. It soon became very obvious that the AUA framework could provide this synergy, providing the missing link between the local restructuring activity and the bigger picture of the institutional change programme.

### **3. Project Participants**

The project involved all of the administrators within EAS – that is 30 members of staff crossing the whole spectrum of administrative activity including student support, academic support, research support, partnerships, admissions, placement support, purchasing and marketing. The project champion was the EAS School Manager, Andrea Chalk.

### **4. Outline of approach taken**

In order to gain support for the project several members of the management team at both School and University levels were approached and informed about the project. These included the EAS Executive Dean and the University’s Director of Operations who was responsible for taking forward the ‘Aston First’ initiative. As a result of being informed of the project the EAS Executive Dean became involved by delivering an introduction to the project during the team workshop which formed an integral part of the project delivery. In addition the framework was discussed at University level as it was badged as part of the Aston First initiative.

The timeline for the project was not fully defined but rather was approached with a flexible approach – the real target was to begin the academic year 2011/12 with the framework becoming embedded not only in policies and practices (eg PDR object setting, recruitment and induction) but also as part of the daily language of the team.

From the beginning of the development of the project it was felt imperative to have a participatory approach involving the whole team. As a result, the project centred around two main workshops the focus of which would be to develop the AUA framework to be meaningful and personalised to the EAS team. The first workshop involved Team Leaders only as their input was crucial to taking the framework forward and encouraging their team members to do the same. The programme for this workshop is attached at Appendix 1, and the objectives of this workshop were defined as follows:

- have an understanding/appreciation of the AUA professional behaviours in order to explain them to their team
- understand the relevance and importance of the project
- create excitement and motivation about the project

Team Leaders were asked to assess the relevance of the AUA's professional behaviours to the SEAS administrative team. Some suggestions were made for adapting the titles of the nine areas and their descriptors. The group met a few days later to develop these ideas further, and an adapted version of the front two pages of the framework was produced (Appendix 2). During this workshop input was also encouraged regarding the full team workshop that was scheduled to take place one week later. The objectives for that workshop were defined as:

- have an understanding/appreciation of the AUA professional behaviours framework and how it can be used
- understand the relevance and importance of the EAS project
- enhance teamwork
- share ideas for how to adapt and embed the professional behaviours in EAS

The whole team workshop contained similar content to the Team Leaders workshop (programme at Appendix 3); though more time was devoted to how the framework could be used within SEAS. Some useful ideas emerged. The adapted version of the 9 areas of the framework which explicitly links it to the Aston First objectives was presented to the administrative team at this workshop.

Jan Shine, the AUA consultant, was central to the development of the workshops as the vehicle by which the framework would be developed. Jan also facilitated the workshops which was a crucial detail to their success – an external influence helping to deliver and embed new ideas in a very difficult time of change.

## **5. Materials used**

Various materials, both AUA and institutional, were used in the development of the framework.

The defined AUA CPD professional behaviours were used as a starting point for the project before being slightly refined in order to fit with the needs of the team and Aston First. In addition the CPD guidance notes were used especially by the team leaders and the project champion whilst the CPD templates demonstrating possible examples of specific behaviours were used during the workshops in order to demonstrate potential use of the framework at individual, team and institutional levels. A particularly effective resource that was used in both workshops was the 'professional behaviours wheel' where individuals were able to plot their personal effectiveness in each of the behaviours before going on to plot where they felt the organisation needed them to be in each of these areas. This was a particularly effective tool in terms of identifying the development needs of individuals whilst also reinforcing the strengths of each member of staff. It could also be used at both an individual and team level.

In addition, the institutional aims of Aston First were used within which the framework was to be developed – ie the professional behaviours needed to support the Aston First objectives and a clear link seen between the two.

## 6. Observations, learning points

One of the major barriers that the project faced was potential resistance from the staff who were going through a very difficult period of change. The restructuring exercise had resulted in the need to redeploy some staff to new positions whilst others were taken through a challenging process of interviews in order to ensure that staff were mapped to positions correctly. Finally staff that had never worked closely together before were physically brought together and asked to work as a team. There was always the danger that the AUA CPD framework would be seen as part of the restructuring exercise and therefore resisted by the staff. In addition, the restructuring brought extra workload to every member of the team and therefore there was the danger that the development of the framework would be seen as yet more additional work for all.

It was hoped that the participatory nature of the workshops might counteract the possible feeling that this was being 'done' to the team. Indeed, although some evidence of resistance was seen in the full team workshop, it was really seen as a great success and an incredibly useful event not only in terms of the development the EAS framework but also in terms of building the team and encouraging these individuals to work together. Both of the workshops were very positive and the staff seemed to genuinely welcome the opportunity to have input into something that they perceived could help them to develop not only as individuals but also as a team. It was very helpful to have the adapted version of the framework presented in Aston branded colours and ready in time for the whole team workshop as this enabled colleagues to envisage what the framework might look like when applied to their own context. Additionally, the integration of the Aston First initiative into the development of the framework seemed to very successfully triangulate both the team and institutional needs. Although Aston First had seemed to be a remote, university initiative, these discussions made it real and pertinent for all concerned. Indeed, it was a huge success.

The next steps planned for after the two workshops were:

- Consideration of the full nine areas of the AUA's framework to ascertain whether any further changes were required for use within SEAS
- Teams to discuss the ranking of the nine areas of the framework for their areas of responsibility
- Development of functional team charters with the framework being used to inform some of the content of the charters
- Integration of the framework into 2011 PDR round for administrative team

The project was temporarily put on hold when the project sponsor left the university to take up a new role. The AUA has very kindly agreed to carry forward the remaining consultancy days into the 2011/12 academic year and at the time of writing (October 2011) an initial meeting has taken place between the consultant and the sponsor's replacement. It is hoped that the project will proceed with further events to embed the framework within EAS and to develop the team charters. The project sponsor for the first phase, Andrea Chalk, has been invited to continue to contribute to the CPD Network.

## 7. Evaluation

Although formal feedback was not sought from participants attending the two workshops, anecdotal feedback suggests that these were successful not only in meeting the objectives of the respective workshops, but also as an opportunity to bring colleagues together and to foster the idea of 'one team'. The AUA involvement added value to the project in terms of bringing an external perspective as well as the credibility of a sector-wide professional body. *(to be expanded at the end of the project)*

**List of Resources**

Programme for Team Leaders' Workshop (Appendix 1)

Circles diagram and descriptors adapted for SEAS at Aston (Appendix 2)

Programme for Administrative Team Workshop (Appendix 3)

APPENDIX 1

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF  
CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

**TEAM LEADERS' WORKSHOP**

**Tuesday, 5 April 2011, MB186**

Programme

<b>11.00</b>	Welcome and introductions Objectives of session
<b>11.10</b>	Context and objectives of project
<b>11.25</b>	Introduction to the AUA professional behaviours framework
<b>11.55</b>	Using the professional behaviours in practice
<b>12.45</b>	<i>Lunch</i>
<b>1.15</b>	Looking ahead to the admin team workshop
<b>1.30</b>	How can I make the most of this opportunity for my team?
<b>1.50</b>	Feedback and discussion Next steps
<b>2.00</b>	<i>Workshop close</i>

Facilitator: Jan Shine, AUA consultant



### **Achieving results**

Planning and organising workloads to ensure that deadlines and objectives are met within resource constraints.

### **Delivering excellent service**

Providing the best quality service to all stakeholders – students, Aston staff and external relationships. Continually striving to improve the services that we offer.

### **Finding innovative solutions**

Working enthusiastically and with creativity to analyse problems and develop innovative and workable solutions. Identifying opportunities for innovation.

### **Working flexibly**

Adjusting to changing situations, demands and roles. Being receptive to new ideas.

### **Using resources effectively**

Making effective use of available resources including people, information, time and budgets. Being aware of the financial and commercial aspects of Aston University.

### **Working with vision**

Seeing the work that you do in the context of the whole university and taking a long-term view. Communicating vision clearly and enthusiastically to inspire and motivate others.

### **Developing self and others**

Showing commitment to own development whilst helping and encouraging others to develop their knowledge, skills and behaviours to enable them to reach their full potential for the wider benefit of Aston University.

### **Working with people**

Working co-operatively with others in order to achieve objectives. Demonstrating a commitment to equality, respect and well-being for all.

### **Managing self and personal skills**

Willing and able to assess and apply own skills, abilities and experience. Being aware of own behaviour and how it impacts on others.



APPENDIX 3

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF  
CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

**ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM WORKSHOP**

**Wednesday, 13 April 2011, MB206**

Programme

<b>9.30</b>	Welcome and introductions
<b>9.45</b>	Context and objectives of project
<b>10.00</b>	Introduction to the AUA professional behaviours framework
<b>10.30</b>	Defining an excellent administrative service
<b>10.50</b>	<i>Refreshment break</i>
<b>11.05</b>	Using the professional behaviours in EAS
<b>11.55</b>	How can I make the most of this development opportunity?
<b>12.15</b>	Feedback and discussion Next steps
<b>12.30</b>	<i>Workshop close</i>

Facilitator: Jan Shine, AUA consultant