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## **THE USE OF WORKPLACE CORE SKILLS TO IMPROVE EMPLOYABILITY AND PROGRESSION IN THE WORKPLACE**

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### **PURPOSE**

To inform on how a Local Authority has used Workplace Core Skills to improve both the employability and progression in the workplace for employees.

### **BACKGROUND**

The Council established a Better Business Language Skills (BBLs) Project in 2004, to provide a variety of interventions to meet the varying literacy, numeracy and business language needs of employees throughout the Council.

The project was initially expected to run for 40 weeks. During that time, the staff involved identified the training needs of a range of employees, delivered training in various formats and subject areas, provided one-to-one coaching and tutorials and continually assessed the effectiveness of the project.

The areas identified ranged from basic literacy support including reading, writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation to what was identified as 'Business Language' needs, for example composing and writing letters within appropriate conventions, reports writing, composing memos, E-Mails etc. The project also focused on skills such as sentence construction, writing styles and formats, form filling, applying for jobs, numeracy and practical maths and basic budgeting. The Tutor and Employee had an initial screening meeting to identify particular needs, and employees were also sent an initial self assessment sheet to encourage them to think about how their learning needs were affecting them in work and at home (See Appendix 1).

Through research within the organisation, the Project made an initial identification of approximately 100 employees who would benefit from this type of support. However, at that time it was also anticipated that there would be a further demand once the programme was fully marketed and established. The initial employees identified, had quite significant needs in relation to improving their literacy, numeracy and business language skills, which in turn improved their written communication skills. It became clear that whilst there were a number of employees requiring basic skills, many required to develop their Communication and Numeracy skills at a more advanced level – around Intermediate 1, 2 and Higher. It was further identified that in accrediting these skills, we would improve the employability of certain staff as in many Council posts the requirement for Standard Grades in English or Maths or an equivalent qualification were an essential requirement for the job.

It was clear from working with this initial group of staff that their lack of skills in Communication and Numeracy were preventing them from applying for promoted posts within the Council, from undertaking vocational or other qualifications and from taking on new and challenging tasks within their current roles.

In relation to outputs, it was expected that employees would be able to demonstrate improved communication skills in relation to both written and spoken communication and that they would become more confident in their ability to communicate in these forms.

Once the Project was established, it became clear that there was a need to continue to provide this type of program through the Council's Employee Development Team as part of the mainstream training services, as more employees came forward to request support, and service managers approached the Project for customised support sessions to meet their employees specify needs.

As a result of the success on the first 40 weeks project, Council agreed to run the programme for a further year.

This initiative has demonstrated the Council's commitment to the training and development of its employees and in turn has improved staff morale, and supported the development of more effective workplace skills.

## **IDENTIFICATION OF NEED**

The Council has a Corporate Employee Development function within its Human Resources department. The Employee Development team have strong links with training representatives based within each Council department.

As part of the Council's workforce planning strategy, Directors and Heads of Service are required to identify the skills needed to allow their services to meet their aims and objectives, and clearly to identify where skills gaps exist. Advice and guidance is available from departmental representatives and the appropriate Human Resources staff.

Departmental needs are prioritised in terms of known current requirements and known imminent changes. Employees who require new or additional skills are identified and training either provided or sourced externally to meet these needs. A Training Plan is developed taking into account available resources, timing, availability of suitable training, etc. The training is regularly reviewed and up-dated in view of changing circumstances.

Through a comprehensive Performance and Development Review process, Employees are also asked to assess their own skills and knowledge requirements for the effective delivery of service and to consider whether they anticipate changes in the foreseeable future, which may require new or different skills.

Consideration is given to the following:

- Successes and achievements
- Shortfalls and disappointments
- Effectiveness of working relationships
- Suggestions for improving the work of the service
- Career objectives for the coming year
- Volume and Quality of Work
- Knowledge of Job
- Organisational Skills
- Communication Skills
- Personal Objectives

Within these areas of assessment Staff can identify their own current level of skills and knowledge and then compare these against future requirements. If there is a shortfall, consideration to further training or development is recommended where appropriate and discussed with the individual in relation to the best method for addressing identified needs and a personal development plan is drawn up. These Plans are agreed with the employee which set learning objectives, learning outcomes and a realistic timescale for completion.

By using this training needs analysis mechanism, employees with literacy and numeracy shortfalls could be identified. However Managers were unsure of how to deal with this particular type of need or how to approach the employee in this regard. This was then tackled in two stages.

Firstly the Council designed a training session around Literacy and Numeracy Awareness which was delivered to Managers attending the Level 1 – Understanding Management Principles course and Level 2 – Effective Operational Management course (See Tutor Notes at Appendix 2). This was to increase awareness of literacy and numeracy skills within the workplace and to encourage Managers to be more open and relaxed about discussing this with their employees.

Secondly, the Council produced a course descriptor entitled 'Business Language' to attempt to encourage staff to make contact to discuss their particular needs (See Appendix 3).

Frequently within Scottish local authorities, employees are required to undertake vocational qualifications in relation to registration or compliance requirements or as part of workforce planning. This has been identified as an area of concern particularly within the manual workforce and the home care sector, where future requirements laid down by Sector Skills Councils require staff to achieve minimum standards of qualifications.

In support of this the BBL project is providing training in core skills in communication and where appropriate in numeracy to support those with particular needs in this area.

As part of future developments in relation to workforce planning, the Strategic Workforce Planning Team are looking at identifying competencies for posts across all levels. It is intended that support staff in administrative roles will be expected to demonstrate competency against the core skills at certain levels. This will allow a more transparent route to career progression for these grades, which previously has often relied on length of service or opportunism.

Once the competency framework has been agreed, a minimum skills audit will be undertaken, level by level and in ascending order. This will allow the Council to identify areas of need and to deliver specific, targeted, measured programmes to address this need.

## **COMMITMENT AND SUPPORT**

To enable employees to develop their skills in this area, it was essential that Departments release them from their workplace and also that line management provide them with a support mechanism. This was crucial to the success of the programme, as some managers did not feel that addressing

core skills was essential to the performance of their staff and they had to be encouraged to see how this would benefit not only the individual but service delivery in the longer term.

The training and coaching took place in a variety of locations including the Council's Training and Development Centre but also took place in the employee's workplace to reduce the amount of time away from work.

Following the continuous evaluation of this initiative and its success, recommendations for ensuring literacy training forms part of the Council's core training plan were made.

## **EXAMPLES**

### **Example 1**

A member of staff was working as a General Operative within Building Services. This person had no formal qualifications. After some time working with Electricians he approached the Council to enquire about sponsorship through his Craft Apprenticeship. The Council agreed to this and the employee was registered with an appropriate Training Provider. Entry onto this programme required candidates to display a level of ability in numerical skills, and this was assessed through a formal test. The staff member failed the test on two occasions and intended to withdraw from the programme. However we were approached and asked to provide support. It became clear that whilst the member of staff had no particular issues with maths questions which were arithmetical in nature, he had a great deal of difficulty with numeracy questions written in a problem solving framework. It was identified that Intermediate 2 Core Skill in Numeracy would be the best method of supporting this employee. Each student has an Ongoing Guidance Contact Sheet (See Appendix 5) which allowed the Student and Tutor to reflect on learning and plan for future sessions. The employee attended a series of two hourly sessions which fitted around his work pattern and allowed for intensive work on maths problem solving. A variety of resources were used to support

learning include books and on-line learning, which also allowed the employee to practice at home. After some intensive one-to-one work, and a great deal of effort in his own time from the employee, he passed the Core Skill and subsequently the entry examination and is now fully employed as a Craft Electrician. Providing this type of support allowed us to develop this employee into a more rewarding role and provided the Council with a member of staff ready to move into the qualified position as soon as a post became available.

### **Example 2**

A member of staff working as a Pool Supervisor had, as a result of an accident, damaged her arm which meant she was no longer able to work in this environment, as her ability to pull someone from the water and provide essential lifesaving was in question. She had no formal qualifications and was keen to retrain, however suitable alternative posts were restricted due to her disability. We identified a possible post in a local School as a Classroom Assistant, and after assessments were carried out this was confirmed as a suitable post. However Classroom Assistants must hold a standard grade or equivalent in maths and English. Core Skills in Numeracy and Communication at Intermediate 2 were identified as being suitable equivalencies, and after one-to-one support, some group work and personal effort this member of staff is now qualified and working as a Classroom Assistant, thoroughly enjoying her new career.

### **SUMMARY**

Core Skills assessment and certification has provided our employees with:

- An increased confidence in learning
- The ability to express themselves more clearly
- The ability to plan and undertake their own personal development
- Enhanced workplace skills
- Improved personal and professional confidence

- Improved communication with others
- Professional development and progression within the organisation

This project allows the Council to tackle the core skill requirements of our employees in a new and innovative way which meets the very many varied needs of our employees.

The success of any programme can only be measured by evaluating the contribution from all stakeholders. Attached is a summary of the feedback received from staff taking part in the programme, line managers and the Course tutors (See Appendix 4).



**Answer YES if the problem happens frequently.**

I read very slowly and may re-read several times before I am sure I understand.

I lose my place or miss out lines when I am reading.

When I write I confuse words that are similar.

I make many spelling mistakes and have difficulty writing reports, letters, etc.....

I have problem filling in forms.

Some days I spell better than others.

I cannot copy things down accurately.

I have difficulty in retaining immediate information and known as being forgetful.

I dread being given complicated instructions.

I get confused about dates and times.

I find it difficult remembering telephone messages accurately.

I find it difficult to organise myself.

I confuse left for right.

I have difficulty giving directions and following directions.

Many of my difficulties get worse under stress.

I am often thought to be lazy.

## **OBJECTIVES**

- Appreciate the behaviour and actions of clients with literacy needs.
- Understand the problems of literacies, learning anxiety and dyslexia.

## **INTRODUCTION TO LITERACY**

It is important to create a good impression when you are writing at work and that the message is clear and concise. This module is used as an awareness raising session of the support Employee Development can give to those who have literacy or numeracy development needs. You will analyse a variety of interventions used to meet the varying literacy, numeracy and business language needs of employees within the council.

- SAP Project
- Funding for 40 weeks
- Hoping to mainstream it
- To help people with literacy problems including Business language skills
- 100 people already identified

## **WHAT IS LITERACY? – OPEN QUESTION**

Also the business language skills will include:

- report writing
- language
- punctuation
- grammar
- sentence structure
- South Ayrshire speak

## **WHAT IS DYSLEXIA? – OPEN QUESTION** Also known as learning anxiety.

## **HANDOUT WHAT DID YOU DO TODAY? APPROX. 10 MINS**

List 3 things for each section – it doesn't need to be work related. Then tick beside it whether you needed to write, read, spell or use numbers.

Once you have done this score off everything that you needed to be able to write, spell, read and numbers for.

The idea behind this is to see how much difficulty someone with literacy problems has with day to day activities that we take for granted. If you had literacy problems what could you have done today?

## **WHAT IS AFFECTED BY IT?**

**READ:**

- Packaging
- Mail
- TV titles
- Newspaper
- Bus destination
- Instructions
- Street names
- Wage slips
- Forms

## **HANDOUT OF BUS TIMETABLE. APPROX 5 MINS**

How did you get to the answer? Guess work, sounds like, experience, intelligence etc.

**SPELLING:** Report writing  
Form filling  
Time sheets  
Letters  
Application forms  
Using a dictionary

**WRITING:** Forms  
Applications  
Cards  
Messages  
Instructions  
Signature

What impression do you have when you see neat handwriting?  
What impression do you have when you see untidy handwriting?

**NUMBERS:** Addresses                      Bus fares  
Timetables                              Temperatures  
Time                                        Budget  
Telephone                                Measurements  
Bingo

### **WHAT CAUSES IT?**

- Dyslexia cannot be cured.
- Can find ways of dealing with it
- Albert Einstein, Tom Cruise, Leonardo de Vinci, Thomas Edison, Picasso
- Hereditary
- Could skip generations
- The brain hasn't developed properly the way it should specialize for language
- Hearing problems may have caused it – individuals not being able to process units of sound properly.
- Visual problems add to it. The person doesn't translate and store visual information and then translate it into sounds.
- Difficulties with short term memory. Short term memory only contains approx 12 items of info. After 12 hours it usually breaks up.

## **SELF ANALYSIS QUESTIONNAIRE HANDOUT. APPROX 5 MINS**

Explain and reassure the delegates that you will not be marking the questionnaires – they need to answer them as honest as you can to yourself.

Reveal statistics slide

### **WHAT ARE THE SIGNS/SYMPTOMS**

- Letters jumbled up – helped with overlays to pages of print
- Bright light intensifies problem
- Read off the slide

**HANDOUT READING PASSAGE. APPROX 20 MINUTES TO COMPLETE** – do not allow anyone **not** to finish it.

**HOW DID YOU FEEL COMPLETING THE EXERCISE?**

Tiring            Uncertain        Unsure Frustrated  
Alienated        Stressed         DrainedSlow

Referrals will be through Susan Beaton who will assess the candidate and refer to the learning shop. Mail drops will be in wage slips so everyone knows that there is help available.

**HANDWRITING.**

No.1 please write with your right hand

No. 2 please write with your left hand.

**SPELLING TEST**

Xanthophyll

Kniphofia

Molybdenum

Mangoosteen

Jequirity

Genizah

Focimetry

Ophthalmoscopy



## BETTER BUSINESS LANGUAGE SKILLS

It is important to create a good impression when you are writing at work and that the message is clear and concise. This course covers producing formal written correspondence from A4 business letters and simple reports to composing e-mails and memos.

### **This one-day Course is for you if ...**

- You need to express yourself appropriately in business communications
- You need to develop your vocabulary in terms of business language
- You need to improve communication skills in terms of letters, memos, reports and e-mails

### **Course Content**

- Creating a clear written message
- Making your writing relevant
- Using formal vocabulary
- Correct layout and presentation
- Including relevant content
- Using appropriate tone and style
- Spelling, punctuation and grammar

The course will be delivered to small groups and will run as a half day session - Morning 9.30am - 12.30pm and Afternoon 1.30pm - 4.30pm.

It is possible to work towards completion of an SQA Certificate in Core Skills - Communication at Intermediate 1 or 2. Speak to your tutor for more details.

## Employee Feedback

<b>Comments taken from Evaluation Forms and feedback from clients and their managers are as follows:</b>
Very useful
"I always thought I was stupid, now I know I'm not"
"Not as bad as I thought it would be"
"I am transferring these new skills into the workplace"
Very helpful training
Has helped me write more formally
Really good course; helped be a lot
I am now aware of my punctuation and grammar. Also, the benefits to formalising my writing
More confidence in my written work
"I have remembered how to write and now I am writing a lot more at home and at work"
"I now have loads more confidence in my writing and am now doing a lot more and feel much better doing my SVQ"
"I have learned so much with my numeracy tutoring that I have now passed the apprenticeship entry exam which I originally failed. The tutoring helped me achieve this and I am now an apprentice electrician."

## Tutor Feedback

Employees who attend these courses are looking to develop skills they already have and look at ways of adopting different, sometimes new skills.
The one to one students have more basic needs and are receiving tutoring in areas such as punctuation, grammar, spelling, writing and numeracy.
The students who attend are all keen and enthusiastic to learn. I adopt an approach, which suits their individual needs and style. The students progress is very obvious especially their increased confidence.
As the project has developed over the months, the stigma "literacy tutoring is only for people who can't read or write" has reduced. The marketing and publicity the project has received has helped this. However, there is still a long way to go especially within our Manual Workforce.

The support available to the students from their own managers is proving excellent. Managers are allowing their staff time off during the working day to receive tutoring or training. Managers also help by showing an interest in their learning and offering the students varying types of work, which is in line with areas that are covered during their tutoring sessions.

Some of the students prefer to be tutored in their own time and as such, sessions are available out with normal working hours.

The students set themselves targets / objectives at the beginning of their tutoring session. The progress of each one to one student is then logged and monitored to ensure targets and objectives are being met. To date, each and every student has achieved their own personal goals with a lot of them going on to develop themselves even further as their confidence grows.

### **Manager's Feedback**

I am delighted with the progress made throughout the last year. The early days saw much ground being covered in terms of promoting the project throughout the Authority and in the local Press.

The range of interventions offered have supported a wide number of people within the Authority and helped them to achieve personal and professional goals. The Project has integrated well into the work carried out at the Training Centre, and our decision to offer support on a peripatetic basis, has, I believe, allowed us to reach greater numbers of people and those who work in remote locations. The work being carried out with the manual workforce has also allowed us to target a difficult to reach group and to provide interventions that specifically meet their needs in terms of personal development. The feedback from all those involved in the Project has been excellent. In particular, the business language training events to small groups were very well received and we are set to continue these. The success of the Project can be measured, I believe, in our current bid which has seen us almost double the contact time we can offer our Employees and is in recognition of the wonderful work being undertaken. The funding for this project has allowed us to tackle an often-forgotten area of core skills which will enhance our current provision.

## Ongoing Guidance Contact Sheet

<b>Learner Name</b>			
<b>Interview Location</b>			
<b>Date</b>		<b>Time Spent</b>	
<b>Learners Job Title</b>			
<b>Learners Work Location</b>			
<b>Learner Contact Tel Numbers</b>			
<b>Tutor Conducting Interview</b>			

<b>General Observations</b>	<p>Making great progress with all different aspects. David has been working through examples at home. Speed is increasing. We went through various different examples and David is feeling more confident and feels that the sessions are helping him.</p>
<b>Issues Discussed</b>	<p>We need to spend more time on converting decimals to fractions. Reminded David that during the exam he needs to write his workings down so that when he has time at the end of the exam he can go back through and double check his working.</p> <p>We are aiming to be ready to re-sit the exam in January.</p>
<b>Appropriate Action</b>	<p>To keep working through examples and to alternate the type we are working through t bring up David's speed with the calculations.</p> <p>Working through some examples we have noticed that the questions are sometimes misinterpreted. More practice required in 'problem solving'.</p>
<b>Next Review Date</b>	
<b>Tutor Signature</b>	
<b>Date</b>	



