

SBC Training An Embedded Approach to Numeracy in Care

Background

SBC Training is a small private training company based in Shropshire, which caters for learners in the West Midlands. We train and assess in a number of programme areas including Health and Social Care (the focus of this project), Business and Administration, Management, Customer Service and Advice and Guidance. Many of our learners are apprentices, and are therefore required to complete Key Skills (in future Functional Skills) in order to complete their framework.

We have found that many of our Level 3 Health and Social Care learners are generally not very confident with their number skills and our assessor/trainers often did not know what sort of projects to guide them towards when trying to complete their Level 2 Application of Number portfolios. None of the information freely available seemed to give good guidance on how to approach this in a way that was meaningful to the learner or which embedded their learning in their work environment.

We set out to create a set of resources to use with our future Health and Social Care learners who are required to do a maths qualification at Level 2, whether it is Application of Number, Key Skills or Functional Skills. We wanted to develop a system of task sheets and associated tutor guides and resources which are to a certain extent interchangeable and which can be added to and adapted to suit other programme areas in the future.

What we produced

We have created a set of four Task Sheets with the titles: Utilities, Care Home Activities, Care Home Quality Ratings, and Shopping. Each sheet has an associated tutor guide, sample data (for instances when learners can't find source data themselves), suggested answers (to help assessor/trainer confidence in marking work completed) and warm-up activities. There is also a series of 'Help Sheets' which can be used across all task sheets e.g. How to calculate mean, median, mode and range.

Each series of sheets is colour coded, for example task sheets are yellow, sample data is green etc. to help minimise confusion both for learners and staff.

Each Task Sheet has a learner scenario incorporated to give the learner an idea of the context in which such tasks might take place in real life. There is also a list of things the learner might need, a brief description of the interactive activities that the assessor might carry out with the learner as a warm-up, and also the tasks the learner is required to complete either unaided, or with support from a tutor.

It is intended that the tasks, when completed, will make up an embedded Level 2 Key Skills portfolio. When Functional Skills come into place in September, the tasks will also be invaluable preparation for the task-based tests.

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Many of the tasks can be completed with or without the use of a computer and internet access. There are a number of links to useful websites for learners to access if they are confident or have use of a computer.

At the end of each task sheet there is a piece of writing detailing 'What you have learnt' and how it is of relevance.

Each sheet has been carefully designed and worded to make it accessible to all our Level 3 Health and Social Care learners (many of whom have more confidence with their communication skills than their number skills). There are plenty of relevant and interesting images included to break up the text and to make the sheets more attractive and appealing. This approach also extends to the activities produced and to the other associated documentation.

The Tutor Guides, which back up the task sheets, give a detailed explanation of how to support the learner and how to administer the kinaesthetic, mental agility and problem solving activities which act as a warm-up.

The sample data has been researched taking into consideration the environments which many of the Health and Social Care (H&SC) learners are familiar with. This is to ensure that the tasks are embedded and therefore of interest and relevance to the learners. There is some interesting data which has meaning and relevance in many everyday situations.

The Help Sheets can be used on their own as well as being linked with the task sheets. We have produced six so far, covering topics such as 'How to Produce a Pie Chart', through to 'Drawing to Scale'.

Training has been given to those trialling the materials with their learners and this will obviously continue following the project and will be extended to other assessors.

Impact and benefits

We have trialled the products with one of our groups of Level 3 NVQ H&SC learners who will all have to complete AON at Level 2. So far, the impact has been tremendously positive, and although we won't be able to ascertain whether the learners pass their Key Skills until later in the year, we have had a remarkable turnaround in the quality of portfolio work produced as a result of these new resources. All of the first group have now completed at least their first draft portfolio, which is a huge increase on past figures. Historically, completion of the portfolios has been slow and held up achievement of the complete AON Key Skill, making our timely achievement figures low, so we are now confident that achievement (and particularly **timely** achievement) will increase this year.

We issued all learners involved in the trial with a questionnaire following their use of the new task sheets. The feedback was, on the whole, very positive. Many commented that they liked being given some direction when starting a project but enjoyed the opportunity to research data themselves, once they had built up their confidence using the sample data provided. We have also had very positive comments from staff and learners alike (as well as at the dissemination event) on the

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presentation and layout of the materials. People generally like the fact that the resources are colourful and have relevant, yet interesting, images. The overall layout has been praised considerably.

What we learnt

There were some concerns initially that the content of some of the resources was too wordy and perhaps would be too difficult for some L3 NVQ learners to read. We took this on board and asked all those involved in the trials whether they thought this to be the case. They all informed us that they hadn't had any problems with reading or understanding the text, and felt that any less text might detract from their understanding of the project in hand. We also had some positive comments on this at the dissemination event with some stating that they were confident that many of their L2 learners would have no problems with the text used.

Another piece of useful feedback we received early on in the trials from one learner was that they hadn't understood what to do initially as the tutor had seemed unsure of which pieces of data to give the learner. We resolved the issue by going through the process more clearly with the tutor and rewording the tutor guide accordingly. The colour coding system that was subsequently developed really helped too. We are now very aware that comprehensive tutor training is beneficial prior to use of resources with learners, particularly if the tutor is not very confident in her/his own abilities. The learner, when subsequently presented with the resources, felt confident to tackle the tasks.

Many other members of staff from other programme areas expressed significant interest in the resources developed and stated that they felt confident that they could adapt them for their own programme areas.

We also learnt that it takes a great deal of time to research, put together, trial and develop resources like these, and we had underestimated the staff costs involved as a result of this. However, now that the design is in place it should be easier to add new task sheets so, although we are technically out of pocket in the short term, the long-term benefits in learner achievement and timely achievement, and development of future related resources should outweigh this.

Next steps

It has been noted that although the resources were specifically designed with maths in mind, there is some crossover into other skills areas, such as Communication and ICT and we will make use of this where possible.

Now a template is in place we intend to add to the number of tasks to make a really interesting and varied compendium of projects. We will also be extending and/or adapting these resources to cover all of our programme areas.

The resources have been designed with a view to using them as preparation for the task-based tests in Functional Skills starting this September and so we will continue to obtain feedback, using the questionnaire designed, from the next cohorts of learners, to develop and adapt the tasks accordingly.

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Comprehensive dissemination and training will be given to all staff using the resources, and the resources and ideas will be shared with other organisations our company networks with.

Resources produced

Task Sheets 1–4

Tutor Guides 1–4

Help sheets 1–6

Sample data, answers and activities tasks 1–4

Note: Most of these resources have been produced in Microsoft 'Publisher'.

The resources have been produced as a result of a grant awarded by LSIS. The grant was made available through the Skills for Life Support Programme in 2010. The resources have been developed by managers and practitioners. The contents should not be compared with commercially produced resources, although in many cases they may have comparable or better learning outcomes.