**Outstanding teaching, learning and assessment: case study on operational project led by London Learning Consortium**

# Introduction

This project focussed on the core theme of English and literacy, including English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). The lead partner was London Learning Consortium (LLC), a third sector provider who represents the interests of 42 member organisations across some of the most deprived London boroughs that include Newham, Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Enfield. Project partners include Grenfell Housing & Training Association who work with long-term unemployed and ex-offenders; the Surrey Lifelong Learning Partnership (SLLP), who provide foundation for learning & life courses for learners with moderate learning difficulties and disabilities; and NCC who deliver work-based learning in English and maths to health and social care learners.

The table below highlights partner engagement in the project:

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Partner** | **No. of managers engaged (incl. senior managers)** | **No. of practitioners/tutors involved** | **No. of learners involved in project activities** |
| **LLC** | 2 | 6 IAG advisors  7 teachers | 50 |
| **Grenfell Housing** | 1 | 1 IAG advisors  3 teachers | 30 |
| **SLLP** | 1 | 1 IAG advisors  3 teachers | 15 |
| **NCC** | 1 | 5 teachers | 40 |

The overall aim of the project is to increase learners’ motivation to learn English across all partner organisations by enabling them to see the value of developing their English skills and practice. The project focused on improving the impact of information, advice and guidance (IAG) processes to ensure learners gained a good understanding of their strengths and weaknesses along with a strong awareness of the importance and relevance of good English skills to their future aspirations. The project also sought to improve the skills and confidence of vocational tutors to provide outstanding and engaging experiences for their learners when teaching them English.

**Approach**

LLC has a successful track record of enabling learners with complex barriers to use learning as a way to gain self-esteem, confidence and enjoyment of learning (Ofsted report 2014). They do, however, recognise that not all learners and tutors fully understand the importance of developing good English skills, and how crucial this is in enabling learners to access further training and employment. In addition to this, the effective promotion and development of English skills is not yet consistent across all areas of the partnership.

Equality and diversity was embedded throughout the project through:

* Developing an equal relationship between partner organisations to achieve outstanding teaching and learning.
* Meeting individual needs through improved processes and practice.
* Using learners’ feedback to help tutors understand outstanding learning from their perspective.

Taking a holistic approach to the achievement of outstanding teaching, learning and assessment, LLC and its partners worked together on a range of activities that included:

* Improving the skills and knowledge of IAG advisors through observations, learner feedback and training.
* Close collaboration between tutors and IAG staff to ensure that initial assessment processes can be used effectively to personalise and improve learning.
* Tutors working collaboratively across partnerships to improve their skills and confidence, and to develop and share creative ways to overcome learners’ barriers to English.
* Partner meetings to share and develop resources and approaches.
* Staff taking responsibility for planning their own continuing professional development (CPD) based on feedback from learners and observations.
* Involving learners in planning and restructuring the teaching assistant course to better support their learning needs and priorities.
* Embedding the Professional Standards in observation, staff development and appraisal processes.
* Using peer observations (tutors observing each other’s lessons) to enable staff to gain a better understanding of the impact of teaching on learning.

# Outcomes and impact

**Outcomes**

* A restructured curriculum and scheme of work for the level 2 teaching assistant course, with English and maths delivery taking place before the vocational content.
* Learner feedback indicates that they have a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses with regard to English, and know what they need to do to progress into, for example, vocational studies for future employment.
* Learners changed their attitude to academic study. They were able to use technical terminology well, enabling them to communicate effectively with colleagues in their work placements. This led to better placements and job offers.

Learners said:

*“I feel like I have climbed out of a black hole, and can now see the world better, and be part of it.”*

*“I know what is right and wrong without using spell check now.”*

*“I know why formal language is important at work, and I am more confident in the staff room.”*

* Prior to starting the course, learners have a good understanding of how improving their English skills will help to progress further. This awareness has significantly increased learners’ motivation and determination to improve their English.
* Tutors make good use of initial assessment information to differentiate resources and approaches to learning. Staff resistance is reduced as they no longer see the teaching of English as extra work, and are better equipped to recognise and address students’ barriers to learning English.
* Staff have improved their personal English skills, and are more confident to teach English to their learners. Through working collegially across specialisms and partnerships, they have developed a greater range of techniques and resources to teach English.
* IAG staff are now a cohesive team with a good understanding of how the work they do with learners impacts on learner motivation and outcomes.
* Partner relationships are stronger and are more power equal, enabling greater sharing of ideas and resources, and differentiation of approach to meet the needs of different learners and cohorts.

**Impact**

* Improved learner retention, study habits and success as a result of learning the English element early on in the course.
* The quality of learners’ written work improved significantly, reflected in feedback from the external verifier.

# Lessons learned

One key learning point emerging from the project was the importance of developing a cohesive approach to IAG that is valued and respected by the whole organisation. This means providing appropriate training for IAG staff, supported by observations and feedback to help them to develop and improve their skills, and involving learner and tutors in the process.

Providing staff with time and space to explore and develop their skills and confidence in a safe and supportive environment was a crucial factor in helping to overcome staff resistance. It was important for staff to take ownership of their own CPD and break down barriers by working together to share concerns and to develop ideas, strategies and resources.

Peer observation is a powerful tool that provides tutors with a real insight into the impact of teaching on learning, enabling them to gain a better understanding of what helps and hinders the creation of outstanding learning experiences. Because this was led by staff working together, they felt that they had more ownership and control of their learning.

It can be particularly challenging to engage delivery partners with low student numbers, as staff and resources are usually scarce. This was overcome by ensuring that all contributions are valued, and that meetings and CPD events were truly collaborative and of benefit to all involved.

Teaching English at the start of a course enabled learners to develop the study and literacy skills needed to access the vocational curriculum.

# Sustainability and transferability

To further develop staff skills and confidence in teaching English, all staff have been offered a free online functional skills course, and in September LLC is planning to offer a level 3 English course for teaching staff (Ascentis level 3 award in English for literacy and language) which has been piloted by Hackney Community College as part of the outstanding teaching, learning and assessment project.

LLC will work in collaboration with West Thames College to share the findings from the project, to gain feedback and support for further collaborative development of outstanding teaching, learning and assessment.

It is planned to continue to deliver the teaching assistants course with front loaded English provision to increase learners’ chances of success. This approach is transferable across other programmes and contexts, particularly vocational programmes where learners struggle to achieve because of weak English skills.

The peer observation process will be continued to support the development of staff skills and motivation, and will be extended to include thematic observations to focus on specific aspects of teaching, learning and assessment.

Regular observation of IAG sessions, along with feedback from learners will continue to enable the continued improvement and development of highly effective IAG processes.

The regular partnership meetings and shared CPD sessions will continue, and it is planned that partners will take an increasingly active role in planning and delivering these events.

The model of IAG will be further adapted for traineeship learners who, it is anticipated, will need more detailed and complex IAG.

LLC and the delivery partners hope to directly transfer the principles of the project work to maths teaching, providing the same comprehensive initial assessment and feedback progress along with vocational contextualisation.

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