**Outstanding teaching, learning and assessment: case study on operational project led by Skills for Growth**

# Introduction

Skills for Growth is a registered charity and independent learning provider based in South East London. It was formed from the merger of Bexley Training Group and Landmark Training. The organisation delivers apprenticeships in business & administration, childcare and hairdressing, along with study programmes and traineeships. There are currently 400 young people completing apprenticeships with Skills for Growth. The majority are aged 16 to 19 and have been placed into employment by Skills for Growth. 85% are female, 29% are from a black and minority ethnic groups and 8% have a disability or learning difficulty. Apprenticeship delivery features an off-the-job training day each week covering the vocational qualification and the functional skills. Ofsted have judged all aspects of the provision to be ‘Good’.

The overall aim of the project was to build and implement the ‘Pathway to Excellence’, a high quality performance management framework that would drive the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all apprenticeships to ‘outstanding’. (The framework documentation is available on the “Improving Teaching” exhibition site on the Excellence Gateway, in the resources section.)

A collaboration aim for the project was to create better coherence internally, as systems and approaches adopted by the former organisations’ are brought together and further developed.

Key features of the ‘Pathway to Excellence’ framework were:

* collaborative working across the two former organisations to develop and implement the framework;
* use of data dashboards to triangulate judgements about performance and quality and to identify risk;
* effective cross-organisational observation of teaching and learning, assessment and review;
* review and implementation of the Professional Standards;
* effective post-observation improvement planning, including through peer mentoring and sharing best practice.

Implementation of the framework is expected to drive 80% of teaching, learning and assessment to ‘outstanding’ within a year of commencing the project.

# Approach

The activities completed as part of the project included:

* Team leaders from the different teams working collaboratively to (1) define key performance indicators (KPIs), standards and changes to expectations, (2) complete observations of staff working in other teams, (3) provide peer mentors for staff in other teams, and (4) identify and share good practice and ways of working across teams.
* Agreement of a set of KPIs for staff in a tutor-assessor role. The KPIs cover performance bands for learner retention, attendance and achievement and for observations of teaching and learning, assessment and review.
* Development of a data dashboard for each apprenticeship team showing actual performance against the KPIs, by individual member of staff and for the whole team.
* Development of a new and simplified observation scheme covering observation of teaching and learning, assessment and review that focuses on learners, their learning and the progress they have made. Observation records are also used to capture the learner and employer voice.
* Benchmarking of the current position against outstanding practice through implementation of the new observation scheme, with observations being carried out across teams.
* Cross-team support and sharing of best practice, including identification of gold standard practitioners to be utilised as part of induction, staff training, continuing professional development (CPD), peer observation, peer mentoring and performance improvement processes.

The approach also utilised expertise from study programme teams as, although originally from a different part of the organisation, they share many common goals and have specialist knowledge in areas important to apprenticeships e.g. teaching strategies including for learner engagement, differentiation, promotion of equality and diversity and functional skills delivery.

Five team leaders from across the organisation were involved in the work of the project, along with the curriculum manager and MIS (management information system) director. Observations of teaching, learning and assessment and review have been completed with 14 members of staff so far, in sessions involving more than 120 learners. 18 practitioners have also completed an internal survey in order to benchmark current implementation of the Professional Standards.

# Outcomes and impact

The potential impact of the work of the project is expected to be significant in the medium to long term due to the following:

* The data on the data dashboards show a strong correlation between the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by tutor-assessor and learners’ attendance, retention and achievement rates. This data can be used to pinpoint high performing staff and their outstanding practice, in order that this can be shared to benefit all staff and apprentices across the organisation. Similarly, the dashboards will help to identify practice that requires improvement, in order that support can be targeted proportionately where it is needed.
* The effective involvement of staff from other teams in the evaluation of teaching, learning and assessment, the sharing of resources and best practice, and the provision of support.
* A culture shift around how CPD is managed, what it should cover and who is responsible for this was starting to take place as a result of the staff survey to review implementation of the Professional Standards. Previously there was an over-reliance on staff becoming qualified and then awaiting evaluations of practice and the provision of CPD organised by the employer. This resulted in much staff CPD activity focusing on generic training for all staff. Analysis of the survey results highlighted the need for more self-evaluation by tutor-assessors, more engagement with employers for CPD, better use of mechanisms for staff to work together to share best practice internally and more emphasis on CPD relating to pedagogy and the ongoing development of tutor-assessors’ own vocational skills and knowledge. CPD should therefore shift from being generic and reactive, to being proactively driven by the individual to meet his or her own identified needs. In time the focus can then shift from individual to organisational needs as performance improves.

The impact of the above activities is being monitored through the data dashboards. Progress is also being monitored against the target for 80% of teaching and learning, assessment and review sessions to be judged to be outstanding within 12 months.

# Lessons learned

Lessons learned include:

* The data on the data dashboards show a very strong correlation between the quality of a tutor-assessor’s teaching, learning, assessment and review practice and their rates for learner attendance, retention and achievement. The dashboards provide managers with the ‘bigger picture’, that in turn helps avoid decisions about current performance being made based solely on the grade from the most recent observation. Similarly, gold standard practitioners/peer mentors can be selected based on their strong performance across a range of key measures.
* The design of observation records for teaching, learning and assessment should be as simple as possible, to ensure that learners, their learning and their progress are the main focus of evidence collection and judgements. Observation forms that feature lengthy tick lists can distract observers from what is actually important.
* When conducting observations of assessment and review, the opportunity to talk to learners and their employer about the teaching and learning should not be missed. Learners talked quite freely about the strengths and perceived areas for improvement in their teaching and learning, when the purpose of the visit was to observe the assessor.
* No- and short-notice observations provide a real window to the tutor-assessor’s everyday practice and the learner’s usual experience of the organisation’s apprenticeship delivery.

# Sustainability and transferability

The organisation plans to do the following, in order to sustain the work of the project and move 80% of teaching, learning and assessment to ‘outstanding’:

* Extend the number of gold standard practitioners so that there are sufficient to support all staff, across all key processes and all teams.
* Provide a programme of ongoing training and CPD for the gold standard practitioners.
* Review how gold standard practitioners could work collaboratively with other providers.
* Extend the data dashboards to cover study programme and traineeship provision.
* Continue with the programme of observations using the new documentation, in order to measure progress with achieving the project aims and to identify more good practice.
* Review how business collaboration software (e.g. Yammer) can be used internally to share best practice, ideas and resources across apprenticeship teams and other provision.

The work of the project is transferable to other organisations, settings and groups in the following ways:

* The performance and quality management framework and toolkit, including the new observation and CPD records, can be adapted and used by other providers in a range of apprenticeship settings.
* Data dashboards can be set up by importing data on attendance, retention and achievement by members of staff and presenting this alongside data on the outcomes from their most recent observations.
* The CPD survey questions can be used by other providers to survey their own staff about implementation of the Professional Standards.

**Case study written by Julie Guest, Peer Advisor**