

Integrating English and maths into work based programmes: the role of assessors and trainers

Supported provider: Capital Training Group

Improvement partner: Mary Conway, LSIS Associate



Summary

This case study explores a consortium of companies who specialise in work based learning. In particular it charts the development of vocational trainers and assessors across the organisation as they begin to build a powerful, professional role in preparing their learners for improvement and achievement in English and maths. The study will be of particular interest to private training providers and those involved with work based learning who are strongly reliant on employers, trainers and assessors to deliver functional skills and to raise learner levels in English and maths.

Introduction

About Capital Training Group

The Capital Training Group is a subsidiary of recruitment specialists, Capital Engineering Group Holdings Ltd. It was set up in 2009 to manage the delivery of government funded training programmes primarily in construction, but now including business administration, customer services and ICT. A number of subsidiary companies and subcontractors deliver training on Capital's behalf, the majority providing adults with work placed programmes but also including provision for under 25s through the Apprenticeship programme. Training is centred in London and across the South of England.

What we wanted to achieve

We worked with LSIS Associate, Mary Conway, over two periods encompassing six days consultancy - a total of twelve days. When Mary joined us, we had just emerged from a challenging Ofsted inspection in October 2011 and our immediate goal was to develop and implement a **whole organisation strategy for English and maths** across our consortium of partners and subcontractors. We wanted all members of our organisation to recognise the fundamental place of these functional skills in **learner achievement** and to engage in the integration of English and maths into vocational programmes as an essential building block in our aim to **improve teaching and learning** across the board. In addition we recognised that **our confirmed commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion** could only become a reality in a culture of **individualised learning opportunity**, which must include, as a priority, English and maths skills development for individual learners.

In the immediate term, we wanted to raise our game with Ofsted and to begin a process of change whereby English and maths would become central to our learner support.

Implementation

Planning our approach

The consultation process began with the managers. First we held a senior management meeting where Mary Conway worked with us to scope the programme. We then met with our full consortium management group to explore our current position and form an action plan.

Present at these meetings were: Shirley Woodcock (Business Development Manager), Alex Galway (Director), Jim Gallagher (Quality and Curriculum Manager) and a learner representative as well as managers of:

- Future Un-Ltd;
- CTG;
- The Plumbing Academy;
- Industrial Training Services Ltd; and
- Hands on Skills Training (HOST).

Two progress routes were agreed as shown below.

Route one: the strategy	Route two: the pilot
We would develop a whole organisation strategy for English and maths.	We would work with our most hard-to-reach section of the organisation to pilot new ways in which those trainers and assessors could manage and guide their learners to successful achievement in English and maths
What happened with the strategy	What happened with the pilot
A consultation session at the consortium management meeting involved all managers listed above and enabled them to invest in, and own, a new English and maths vision and strategy. The strategy was written up, formally approved and circulated for staff consultation and feedback.	The pilot became a team effort between Mary Conway, Jim Gallagher, Garry Burnett who is Business Development Manager of Hands on Skills Training (HOST), and five trainers/assessors from HOST.

Mary Conway, Shirley Woodcock and Jim Gallagher worked together to oversee these two strands. Our plan, initiated in May 2012, identified the following actions.

- Development of a draft strategy in time for an Ofsted monitoring visit in May 2012.
- Identification of appropriate assessment and diagnostic tools for immediate use across the consortium by the end of May 2012.
- Implementation, by June 2012, of a programme of assessment and monitoring cycles to be overseen by the Quality and Curriculum Manager.

- Development of information, advice and guidance (IAG) to reflect whole consortium strategy, July 2012.
- Delivery of a series of CPD and workshop sessions for trainers and assessors of Hands On Skills Training (HOST) to address integration into the learner journey through assessment, individual target setting, monitoring and feedback, skills building, individual learning plans (ILPs), schemes of work and lesson plans, June 2012.
- A staff skills audit by June 2012.
- A process of data capture on the management information system (MIS) for English and maths, including tracking of learner progress, by June 2012.
- Development of a resource strategy and draft staff toolkit by December 2012.
- Staged roll-out of strategy throughout the consultancy programme, to June 2013.
- Progress review at various stages, May 2012 – June 2013, including presentation to the company's annual conference in February 2013.
- Capture of learner feedback through a targeted questionnaire by June 2013.

A range of resources/technologies were used including data capture through MIS, the promotion and use of online resources for learners, the promotion of Moodle (or similar) and of blended learning methods.

Future development of these actions, beyond the life of the LSIS consultancy project, would be the responsibility of the Business Development Manager and Quality and Curriculum Manager, supported by the whole consortium management group.

What we did

Route one: the strategy

The strategy was developed through full consultation and collaboration with management and was used as a starting point for HOST to develop their action plans. It represented the cohesive approach of all Capital Training Group companies and was to be subject to regular review in line with the consortium operational and business plan and quality cycle.

The first draft of the strategy was produced as a result of two planning events. This involved a meeting between the Business Development Manager, the Quality and Curriculum Manager, the Director of HOST (a member company) and Mary Conway from LSIS. The second event was a consortium development session in which nine managers and one learner representative:

- worked to assess current progress in English and maths using the LSIS Health Check;
- identified areas for development;
- defined the vision of 'a whole consortium approach' to English and maths; and
- began an action planning process.

The strategy focused on eight priorities and a clear vision. Details are below.

Vision: The skills of English and maths underpin all achievement for our learners. We will integrate English and maths assessment, target setting and support into all programmes so that each learner, irrespective of level, will have the opportunity to succeed and progress.

1.	A whole consortium approach to English and maths so that the development of these skills would become integral to all our provision.
2.	Buy-in from our learners, employers, trainers and assessors through consultation, training and professional development of staff.
3.	Integration of English and maths into all programmes for all learners so that they could achieve and progress to their full potential.
4.	Support for all learners so that they could develop their English and maths to meet the requirements of their vocational programmes and precede towards functional skills qualifications in English and maths, as appropriate.
5.	High quality teaching and learning models and methods.
6.	Individual target setting in English and maths incorporated into individual learning plans (ILPs). These targets would relate to the needs of vocational programmes and would include national qualification goals as appropriate. The level of qualification normally targeted would be one level below that of the main vocational programme. Those on Apprenticeship schemes would target functional skills for English and maths from 2013.
7.	Robust recording and measuring of achievement data for English and Maths, including achievement against individual targets.
8.	English and maths seen as central to our learner entitlement and as key building blocks in our approach to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Route two: the pilot

The pilot project focused on the delivery team from HOST who train and assess some of the most hard-to-reach learners in the consortium: often experienced adults in the construction industry, many of whom attend training on a part time or short block basis and require English and maths to be built into their work-based schedule. The pilot consisted of three staff training sessions to explore:

- the place of consultation and the need for buy-in;
- the strategy: not as a document but as a way of working; and
- changes required in ways of working and thinking for trainers and assessors.

Staff were encouraged to work from their own experience and to discover the essential nature of English and maths in their vocational delivery, and to recognise how these skills would enable their learners to achieve. In workshops they collaborated in twos or threes to:

- a) identify where and how English and maths skills were essential to the learners' vocational activity;
- b) identify where and how they were already helping learners to master these skills;
- c) reasons for the strategy: the imperatives of government policy and regional requirements;
- d) integrate English and maths into the learner journey by identifying essential points of assessment, monitoring and feedback for these skills;
- e) incorporate English and maths into their schemes of work and lesson plans;
- f) develop a process of individual target setting for their learners; and
- g) integrate English and maths into their ILPs.

These were very practical sessions which required the trainers and assessors to understand in depth what precise skills are included in the titles 'English' and 'maths'. They also explored the criteria and methodology for functional skills, which was still new to many and being offered only for a minority on Apprenticeship programmes. The participants engaged with a problem solving process and began to identify with the learner the need for:

- explicit recognition of naturally occurring English and maths in their work and life;
- clear targets for improvement;
- bite-sized, achievable learning activities; and
- feedback that was clear and confidence building.

In the workshops, the trainers and assessors also developed banks of individual learner targets and built models for all programme documentation which they could use effectively to shape their interaction with learners and raise achievement in English and maths.

Overall staff responded well to these workshops, recognising the relevance to their learners and observing how they could set individual targets for English and maths, especially for those learners whom they only saw for a single five day stretch. All models and documents developed in these sessions were then referred back to senior management for further implementation across the organisation.

The resource strategy and toolkit

Following a formal review of this process with senior management, Mary Conway began her second stage of consultancy by focusing on staff and their needs.

The key to all development to date had been the need for vocational trainers and assessors to support learners in their English and maths. For many of these staff, this was a challenging prospect as they did not believe themselves to be fully competent and were not formally qualified. However, many of them were already assisting their learners with these skills. Maths, in particular, was seen to form an essential part of the construction course content, and,

although the assessors habitually helped their learners with these skills, this had not been formally documented.

At the review meeting, it was agreed that we should put in place a means of further supporting vocational trainers and assessors, and that this would focus on a range of appropriate resources. We began by developing a resource strategy and a draft toolkit.

The resource strategy began by identifying points of the learner journey where staff would need access to resources. These resources might be existing or new documents or materials which could be found from a range of suppliers or online. It would be the task of staff and their managers to create and assemble a bank of such resources both for team and individual use, and to make them freely available across the organisation online, through a virtual learning environment (VLE) or in hard copy.

The purpose of the draft toolkit was to act as a starting point for all teachers, trainers and assessors in the Capital Training Group who wished to support their learners in developing functionality in English and maths. It demonstrated how to draw from vocational content naturally occurring requirements for English and maths skills and how these skills could be:

- a) **identified**, from vocational content;
- b) **developed**, in the interests of vocational success for the learner; and
- c) **applied**, to a variety of scenarios to enable the learner to become functional in these skills.

Its stated aims were to:

- enable all managers, trainers and assessors in the consortium to raise learner achievement through the staged and integrated development of functional English and maths;
- outline a three-stage process for the development of functional skills in English and maths; and
- provide model learning activities and resources to support functional English and maths development on vocational programmes.

In the development of the toolkit, the need for a qualified lead in English and maths across the consortium became increasingly evident. This is an issue that the company will need to take forward, investment to date in English and maths specialists having been confined to an ESOL teacher for selected groups of learners. The aim of the company will be to develop existing named staff so that they become skilled and qualified to lead, teach and support English and maths while retaining their vocational expertise.

Outcomes and impacts

What we achieved

The focus for the company was to develop a whole consortium strategy and approach for the integration of English and maths into vocational programmes. The aim was to raise learner achievement through improved teaching and learning and to implement a policy of equality,

diversity and inclusion. This was to be realised through an enhanced role for trainers and assessors in the development of learner skills in English and maths.

At our review meetings and at the company's annual consortium conference, the verdict was that we had set in motion a path to effective integration of English and maths into the learner experience. A strategy is now in place, complemented by an additional resource strategy. Models for effective planning, target setting and tracking of learner performance have been established. Initial assessment and diagnostics are implemented across the consortium and English and maths is gaining a higher profile for learners, trainers, assessors, employers and administrative staff by the day. Data is captured more efficiently and functional skills are becoming a reality. At the time of writing, further work is in progress to assess both outcomes and impact of these steps, particularly through a learner review process. Also further action planning will take place in June 2013.

At our Ofsted monitoring visit, our lead inspector made the following comments.

“Rapid improvements have been put in place and Capital Training Group and its consortium partners are now on an exponential curve and need to continue building upon the foundations it has put in place.”

“Capital Training Group is the most organised provider we have ever inspected on a monitoring visit.”

What we learned

- Full involvement of managers and staff is essential for a strategy to be meaningful.
- Engagement of employers and, through them, the learners is essential if we are to raise skills levels in English and maths.
- Vocational trainers and assessors play a vital role in supporting their learners' development of English and maths, providing them opportunities to practise these skills.
- Specialist, qualified leadership and teaching expertise in English and maths within the company is essential to a) implement the consortium strategy, b) enable the trainers and assessors to fulfil their role in relation to the learners' English and maths development and c) provide the learners with the essential range of teaching and learning opportunities necessary to raise levels in English and maths.

What we are taking forward

- We will continue to support and develop the role of trainers and assessors in raising learner levels in English and maths across the consortium.
- We are going to prioritise engagement strategies so that employers, trainers, assessors and all who come into contact with learners will understand how they can help raise skills levels in English and maths and act accordingly.
- We are going to develop skilled and qualified champions for English and maths who will work with senior management and key staff to implement our whole consortium strategy.
- We will develop a questionnaire for learners, to engage them in a reflection and review process that will ensure continuous improvement in our English and maths provision.

How we are sharing it

We are in the process of arranging a peer exchange group to share our experience and learn from other organisations. Also Capital Training Group has recently expanded its number of consortium members to include, in particular, two new organisations with a wide range of experience in the embedding of English and maths. Building on the experience of these two organisations, we will develop a larger group of likewise experienced peers and implement an exchange programme that will encompass the observations of teaching, learning and assessment to include English and maths.

Key lessons learned

- Vocational trainers and assessors perform an essential role in raising learner levels in English and maths.
- Vocational specialists who, themselves, become trained and qualified in the teaching of English and/or maths provide highly credible leaders, teachers and champions in these skills and act as excellent role models for learners.
- A resource strategy and banks of resources should be assembled for use at all stages of the learner journey by trainers and assessors.
- A constant dialogue with learners including engagement strategies, personal target setting, monitoring, tutorial support and feedback is essential if you are to raise their levels in English and maths.

What advice we would give to others

- Engage all trainers and assessors in the vision, delivery and practice of English and maths teaching and learning.
- Enable each member of staff to develop a clear role in relation to English and maths teaching and learning.
- Integrate English and maths into all stages of the learner journey and into all documentation, assessment and feedback processes.
- Build banks of resources to support the learners in English and maths at all stages of their journey.
- Ensure that you have suitably qualified English and maths experts at your company's disposal for programme management and delivery.
- Where possible, develop vocational staff so that they become your professional experts in English and maths
- Make every effort to engage employers with the value of functional skills to their business and their learners.

Contact information

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Provider name: Capital Training Group

Contact : Shirley Woodcock, Business Development Manager
swoodcock@capitaltraininggroup.co.uk