

Environmental sustainability and its Impact on Quality in the FE sector

Equip Training SW Ltd



Project Synopsis

The project explored the impact of sustainability in the FE sector revolving around the use of computers within e-learning centres. It increased the knowledge of all staff, achieved a quality standard, ISO 14001, developed an e-learning course and involved long term unemployed into the green agenda and whether increased knowledge in this sector improved basic numeracy, literacy and employability prospects.

Project Aims

This project aimed at integrating the sustainability agenda into delivery of FE based e-learning. There were three major objectives of increasing knowledge, achieving a quality standard and improving the knowledge of individuals to see if there was an impact on their core learning objectives. I.e. Is sustainability a new key skill without which it is becoming increasingly difficult to find employment.

Internally the majority of staff in FE are well trained in their subject specialism and also as a teacher. There are increasingly other areas that they need to be experienced in including skills for life, which has been embedded in areas for many years, and increasingly employability skills. I.e. Is the training individuals receiving making them more employable.

In internally improving tutors knowledge – through workshops, questionnaires and changing practices the knowledge of all employees has been increased. Formally this has been acknowledged by achieving ISO 14001.

Project Delivery

The innovation came from challenging staff members to widen their horizons and lift the aspirations of learners. Staff who were comfortable in their own areas had their perceptions challenged. In many ways it seemed equivalent to challenging racism in the 1980's. I.e. What was acceptable social behaviour 5 years ago is no longer valid.

The project was successful in engaging staff but some areas did not seem relevant – ie how is waste defined in an educational environment? One benefit came from the realisation that our potential sphere of influence exceeded the benefits of many internal changes. EG With access to over 2000 learners if their behaviour could be changed would have a larger impact than 30 staff.

The requirement of ISO14001 involved including all staff and was a successful rallying point. All staff felt proud at achieving the standard and it helped create a feeling of working in a modern environmentally friendly company.

In developing an on-line course an external IT company were engaged. It was difficult at first to explain the connection between sustainability, FE and the use of IT. It was essential to give a clear brief and to hold regular project meetings. A question was how can you bring innovation to a new area when there are few basics in place, or external organisations are ready to issue standard packages and costs are exorbitant if new areas are explored.

Where innovation worked best was when an inclusive process was used and if the overall action can be broken down into small steps. People can be overwhelmed with too much knowledge and need to know how much of it applies to their area. At many points we were asked "Interesting but how does it apply to me?". Appointing champions, who were not direct line managers, worked well. Weather maps to measure an individual's knowledge were effective and a different way of applying staff questionnaires.

The use of external consultants brought a level of expertise not possible if only using internal staff. The 20/50/50 group had up to date knowledge, were enthusiastic and helped explore non-standard issues. There were aspects of how is Global warming effected by a tutor delivering literacy that were discussed, this explored areas of inter connectedness. Questions obviously arise of "What is the remit of the FE sector?". Without guidance from funding agencies such as the SFA it is possible that this is merely seen as an additional cost whereas in reality it should be an essential. EG IS Sustainability build into the Ofsted guidance for inspections? At present it appears as no but it is often used as evidence of good practice.

Success was easier when the project worked as a continuous improvement project and terms that are within the standard FE framework – SAR's, Quality Improvement plans etc. The term innovation worried people and the project flowed when specific targets were established and processes laid out. This overlapped with the need for good project management and training in these areas proved effective.

Project Outcomes

Directly the outcomes included:

- To determine the environmental impact in terms of CO2 emissions/carbon neutrality of an adult education centre.
- Achieve ISO 14 001 and to adapt lessons/integrate into SAR process
- Develop best practice for the educational sector in Environmental awareness
- To improve an individual's environmental knowledge and awareness to allow them better access to the new knowledge based jobs market
- To improve success rates within Skills for Life as delivered by ICT methods by improving the environmental quality of the centre
- To train 2 members of the partnership in project management and become environmental champions within their respective organisations

All the above outcomes were met. To determine CO2 emissions we will be carbon neutral in three years, this will be measured through the ISO 14001 audits, which also helped to research and implement best practice.

Individual's knowledge was improved both internally and externally. There was more indirect success when applied to skills for life success rates. It improved inclusivity and helped widen aspirations but impact on exam rates in trial groups was negligible.(90% v 91%).

Unforeseen outcomes: The project developed smoothly and overall went according to plan. The external consultants were excellent and it paid dividends taking time to work with organisations that understood the educational environment.

The online course took a while to fully understand- extra training and time for the delivery tutors who both had to understand a new platform and new curriculum area.

Impact – The project was successful in engaging learners and using the green agenda as a motivational tool. Tutors used area knowledge to naturally embed skills for life practice.

The stand-alone course was not so successful as a tool for improving skills for life pass rates. It was not possible to find an increased pass rate in skills for life in the trial groups that were run. This may be in the methodology of only allowing learners to take an exam when they are ready and undertaking an additional course slowed the process but helped in confidence. Further trails would be required to establish the best way to integrate. It would be an extension exercise to embed functional skills within the course.

Sustainability – in achieving a recognised quality standard there is the requirement for annual audits and checks. By Building this into the role of at management level will ensure sustainability is seen as a baseline and not an optional extra.

The on-line course is being used as a full cost delivery project and as an motivational tool within other subject areas. It is planned to extend the tutors knowledge in order to deliver full width level 2 qualifications in sustainability and the green agenda.

Success: Integrating sustainability into purchase procedures. I.e. there is now a preferred list of suppliers who have sustainable credentials and we will only purchase from those companies.

Sharing of Project Findings

The project has been distributed internally through regular newsletters and staff briefings. Other Learndirect centres have been briefed on the project through regional meetings. They have been invited to send a tutor down who could potentially become their own internal champion. Locally during partnership meetings the same presentation has been made and external, sometimes non-educational bodies have been invited to the centre to look at the integration of sustainable and waste reduction methodology.

This project is not one that can be rolled back and the green agenda is becoming increasingly important in every area of life. Many organisations at the start of the project did not have their own procedures or they were limited in scope and delivery. When we talk to partner organisations now this is no longer the case and cost management in applying waste reduction techniques is widespread.

The biggest success was in engaging learners in the wider agenda. Whilst not measured through noticeboards, quizzes and seminars we have the ability to change the behaviour of over 2000 households. If the Green agenda is to be successful this training and changing of minds is essential.