

## Changing direction: Meeting the needs of the Food Industry

### National Centre for Food Manufacturing (NCFM): The University of Lincoln



#### Introduction

##### About the National Centre for Food Manufacturing

The University of Lincoln's National Centre for Food Manufacturing (NCFM) supports the skills development of some 1,500 food industry employees each year on a range of Apprenticeships, Adult Skills courses and Higher Education programmes.

The University's provision for the food sector at Holbeach has acquired a national reputation as an exemplar model of an industry specific, employer driven curriculum that offers a seamless route of progression from further education (FE) into higher education (HE) for vocational learners. The campus benefits from outstanding resources including specialist food laboratories, sensory suits and a purpose built technical training centre. This is built to food factory standards and equipped with a fully automated fresh food weighing and packaging line and other state of the art equipment.

Our Skills for Life (SfL) provision is an FE programme that provides literacy, language and numeracy support in the workplace. This provision started in early 2004 with one class of adult literacy and numeracy at Geest Foods in Spalding. Nine years on, a team of nine SfL tutors teach about 550 employees a year in food factories from Grantham in the north through to King's Lynn in the south. This growth is largely due to the increased numbers of foreign nationals working in the food sector.

##### Supported provider

University of Lincoln:  
National Centre for Food  
Manufacturing (NCFM)  
*Rachel Bowser, Skills for  
Life Co-ordinator*

##### Improvement partner

Training Plus Merseyside  
*Claire Collins, Development  
Adviser*



## What we wanted to achieve

Employees are accredited with City and Guilds 3792 Adult Literacy Awards (with a few gaining a Numeracy Award). Both employers and employees prefer these awards because they are relevant to the workplace, are more suitable for short courses and for mixed English and foreign national groups. With the demise of basic skills awards, we are moving to the new English and Maths qualifications at Entry Level and Functional Skills at Level 1 and 2. Claire Collins of Training Plus Merseyside has been helping the team by:

- coming to the campus to deliver workshops to the team;
- observing tutors teach functional skills and delivering some functional skills teaching; and
- supporting tutors in developing and adapting schemes of work and lesson plans and learning materials.

## Working with employers: setting up an on-site course

Every course has to meet both the needs of the employer and employee: quite a tall order! Planning is crucial and can take some time so patience is required. Below is an example of the usual route that is followed.

What	Who	Purpose	Cost
<b>Presentation</b> 1 hour	Human Resources Managers (HR) and the Skills for Life Co-ordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss workforce skills (literacy, numeracy and language) needs of the company.</li> <li>• Help to identify level of skills needed for different job roles.</li> <li>• Assess levels of skills on recruitment and/or of current employees.</li> <li>• Discuss how to set up an on-site course.</li> </ul>	No cost
<b>Awareness session</b> 1 hour	Human Resources, Production Manager, Supervisors, Team leaders, Skills for Life Coordinator/ Tutor.	To raise awareness of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• language/Skills for Life courses for the company;</li> <li>• benchmarking language levels for different job roles;</li> <li>• how best to help employees develop skills; and</li> <li>• benefits of improved communication and other skills.</li> </ul>	No cost
<b>Initial assessment</b> 2 hours	Foreign national and English employees	Initial assessments are carried out using materials that have been internally developed and are relevant to the food industry. The initial assessment programme identifies skill levels in reading, writing, speaking/listening and numeracy.	£20 per employee

Maximum group size of eight	University SfL tutor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Results and report, with recommendations, is sent to the company within a week.</li> <li>• Company decides who will be offered a class.</li> <li>• Programme dates and times are negotiated.</li> </ul>	The SfL team have trained many companies to do their own initial assessment
<b>On-site language/ SfL Classes</b>  12 in group  19 weeks x 2 hours a week.	Foreign national and English employees  University SfL tutor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tutor is appointed.</li> <li>• On-site visit by tutor to take photos in the factory and collect relevant paperwork to tailor the course to the needs of the company.</li> <li>• Company prepares and agrees the vocabulary list.</li> <li>• Tutor delivers on-site language/Skills for Life course.</li> <li>• Employees receive high quality materials, CDs, homework, EYE (Enjoy Your English) books etc.</li> <li>• Fourth week: co-tutor conducts early reviews, negotiates individual learning plan with students and sends them to the company.</li> <li>• Tenth week: interim review takes place between tutor/employee to review progress and sent to the company.</li> <li>• Seventeenth/eighteenth week: co-tutor provides assignment support.</li> <li>• Nineteenth week: final review takes place to review progress and employee and employer provides feedback about the course.</li> <li>• Employees gain either the City and Guilds 3792 Adult Literacy/Numeracy Entry, (in future the new English and Maths Awards) or City and Guilds 3748 Functional Skills in English or Maths at Levels 1 and 2.</li> </ul>	£50 per employee  (including City and Guilds certificate £30)

## **Working with employers: Key challenges**

Establishing and maintaining a Skills for Life course in a company is always a challenge because each company is so different. How the courses are delivered depends on a variety of factors, including:

- the size of company;
- the type of operation (packing, processing – high care/low care);
- the working patterns, for example four days on and four days off/12 hour shifts;
- the priority the company gives to language training;
- whether the company releases employees from shift to attend classes or whether students have to attend in their own time; and
- factors affecting second language acquisition such as motivation, the opportunity and time to practice English, personal circumstances, age, prior learning, confidence and general ability.

Companies often want short courses that fit in with their business operations. They want courses to fit in with their shift pattern. Sometimes tutors have to ‘flip-flop’ between a Tuesday and Wednesday or deliver sessions before and after shift hours. The SfL team has to be extremely flexible. The following are some of the challenges they face.

- Business always takes priority over classes: an extra order from TESCO means employees are required to work and are not allowed to attend a class.
- Many employees attend after shift hours. They are tired after a long shift; working in a food factory is hard, monotonous work and can be cold, noisy and wet. They may have transport problems, childcare difficulties or experience other barriers.
- Most companies now run a four-on/four-off shift pattern. If a tutor is on-site just once a week, then employees are not always ‘on-shift’.
- Employees cannot take a holiday over the Christmas period (when there are no classes as requested by the companies) but then have to take their holidays at other times, therefore often unavoidably missing lessons.
- When employees are on holiday, the number of employees available to run the lines is reduced. Consequently, other employees sometimes have to cover and are unable to attend.

Teaching English ‘on-site’ is a challenge because you could have employees from Entry 1 to Level 1, across the different skills of speaking/listening, reading and writing. SfL tutors have to be able to differentiate and relate the teaching to the factory and to the lives of the employees.

We do not have the luxury of teaching groups with the same level of ability. To meet the needs of individual students, from Entry 1 to Level 1, tutors have to sometimes prepare three sets of materials for one topic. This is extremely time consuming. Therefore, we decided two years ago to commission a tutor to develop a literacy/language scheme of work, learning materials and curriculum resources for Entry 1-3 (Beginner programme) and for Entry 3 to Level 2 (Improver programme) for a nineteen week programme. These resources are related to the food

industry. Tutors use these as a 'base' for their teaching. They do not negate the need to prepare well for a lesson. However, they provide a foundation for preparation and are useful if a cover tutor has to deliver a session.

Although the SfL team of tutors may have a wide range of skills and experience when joining the University, this does not usually include working in food factories. Therefore, a thorough induction and on-going training programme is critical. All tutors have to take the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) Food Safety Level 2 qualification, health and safety, safeguarding and equality and diversity training, never mind on going curriculum training. Meetings and training are organised three times a year and tutors are paid to attend. And this is where Claire Collins has been our 'functional skills' angel.

## Implementation

### What we did

#### Moving from basic skills to functional skills

Sue Burke, a member of the SfL team has been heading up the development of our functional skills project. She has attended meetings and training and has been involved with the LSIS project. Her remit has been to pilot functional skills courses, adapt and develop materials with the aim of helping to prepare our team for September 2013 delivery.

Since September 2012, Sue has started three functional skills English courses at three food companies. Karen Wilson is running one course at a fruit company with nine learners and Andy Gorton has eleven Level 1 functional skills students in his various groups in King's Lynn. Andy is working to the reading element on this course and his students will continue onto another course. Sue is aiming towards the full award in one course. The table below summarises our provision.

Company	Tutor	Entry 3	Level 1	Level 2
Company A	SB		3	
Company B	SB	6	4	
Company C	SB			7
Company D	KW	3	6	
Company E	AG	1	10	

#### The pilot courses

During 2011-2012, there was a small pilot with one company. Karen Wilson had ten students achieve part or a full functional skills award at different levels. The original aim had been to run pilot courses for both beginners and improvers but it soon became apparent that these qualifications are not suitable for our lower entry students.

The group at Company A is Entry 1 to Level 1. Sue Burke started to deliver functional skills to the entry students but even the low Entry 3 learners could not grasp or respond to the functional concepts. They are in need of a much more tutor led, grammar focused course. Claire Collins, our functional skills LSIS consultant who observed three classes, reinforced this view. After discussion with Rachel, the Skills for Life Co-ordinator and the company Sue enrolled the nine

Entry students on our basic skills course and the three improver students were enrolled on functional skills Level 1. The students are now all making progress but it is a challenging group to manage and prepare for over only 19 weeks.

The two courses at Companies B and C only have students taking Functional Skills Awards. The Company B group are mostly high Entry 3 learners so they have been enrolled for Entry 3 functional skills. Most of them already have Entry 3 basic skills. Three have been enrolled for Level 1 functional skills. The aim for all of the students is to try for their full award in January 2013.

Company C requested a course for managers and key employees to develop their business English skills and this course is being run over 25 weeks. The course is mainly focussed on students and company requirements but this is very much to the functional skills remit so they are being enrolled on Level 2 functional skills. Depending on progress and attendance, some of them may only achieve a partial Level 2. These may extend their programme and achieve a full award.

The Company D course is completely functional skills. Of the nine students who are on this course all are able to achieve Level 1 functional skills speaking and listening and reading but three need more support with their writing skills and so have been enrolled for Entry 3 functional skills. The course is being delivered over 19 weeks with the aim for all of the students to try for their full award in January 2013. The three tutors share their lesson plans, materials and ideas.

## Outcomes and impacts

### What we learned

Functional skills courses are not suitable for entry students. It has been decided that in 2013-2014 the new unitised English or maths units will be used for our entry students. A pilot of the new English units will start in February 2013 with Andy Gorton leading this development.

The length of our courses will need to be reviewed. Although companies like a short course, 19 weeks is a very short time frame for functional skills at Level 1 and 2. Often students have difficulties attending every session and the exam schedule is more time consuming so 25 weeks minimum may be more workable, but this will have to be reviewed in the light of additional staffing costs.

There is an on-going need to develop and co-ordinate the resources for functional skills Improvers (Level 1 and Level 2) and still many outstanding questions. Should the existing curriculum materials be adapted or should new materials be produced? The SfL team is developing more confidence, understanding and delivery of functional skills. Claire Collins is proving an excellent critical friend.

### What we achieved

#### How do we ensure quality for our learners?

We receive most positive feedback from both employers and employees. Below are some comments from employees, which demonstrate how better English can help them integrate into the community and to progress within the workplace.

- 'I can talk to the doctor and it's better for the baby. When the baby goes to school I will speak better.'

- ‘I enjoyed the lessons because it was like being back at school. I have learnt lots of new words and improved my grammar. I can communicate better at work and with people in the street.’

Employee from Company C, July 2012

- ‘The English class is good because it improved my English. At work it helps me better to communicate between management and the shop-floor workers. I have a better understanding of the job and what I do in reading and writing because I know the words’.

Employee from Company F, March 2013

- “The staff have really enjoyed attending the English classes and as a result there have been improvements within the factory. Staff that once lacked confidence are now having more of an input and some are even starting to learn the line paperwork that we complete every day. One of the main advantages for me is that staff can read Health and Safety signage warning them of potential hazards. A very good course that clearly delivers results!”

Manager, Company A

We strive to maintain a quality standard of learning for our students, but this is not easy with a part-time, mainly peripatetic team. The introduction of new qualifications is a huge challenge. To help maintain standards of learning and assessment, all tutors have a:

- nominated member of staff from the company;
- Skills for Life Tutor Guide which contains all the procedures and paperwork they need to run a course;
- memory stick/laptop/speakers holding all the curriculum and audio materials;
- on-line individual learning plan system which includes employee information, initial assessment results/previous qualifications, qualification aim, reviews, attendance; and
- co-tutor working with them for early reviews and assignment support/marking.

### **What we are taking forward**

We are constantly responding to the needs of the food industry. For example, a company had some incidents caused by using ‘second language speakers’ for interpreting. As an outcome, we designed a two-day ‘Introduction to Company Interpreting for the Food Industry’ course. The company is charged £300 per employee and to-date, 18 employees have been trained.

Trainers in companies sometimes struggle with second language speakers and we now have a two-day course, ‘Supporting Factory Trainers in the Food Industry’ which helps them to understanding the issues faced by non-English speaking employees and how best to support them. Again, this costs £300 per employee and two courses have been delivered.

There is a challenge in introducing the new English and maths qualification and functional skills. Those employers in the LSIS pilot project have been supportive of functional skills. They recognise that they will help ensure employees can apply their skills and knowledge in work situations and help them to improve productivity. These benefits will need to be 'rolled out' to all of our companies.

There is no doubt we have a 'Rolls Royce' model of delivery and many companies and employees have benefited from improved English (and maths), both within the workplace and the community. However, we have to keep a keen eye on our costs in delivering SfL programmes across such a large area and find ways of maintaining our quality to ensure the continued success of our programmes.

## Contact information

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