

Total People

Alternative approaches to CPD: the perspective of a Work Based Learning provider



Total People

[Total People](#) is a large work based learning provider that operates throughout the North West and West Midlands. We deal with apprenticeships, adult apprenticeships, commercial and Foundation Learning. Total People has approximately 5000 registered learners, of which 400 are on Foundation Learning programmes, aged 14-19. This case study has focussed on staff working in Foundation Learning programmes.

The Foundation Learning programme is delivered through specific pathways, which range from vocational pathways (such as hairdressing, childcare and engineering) to an employability pathway. The employability pathway is designed for learners who are vocationally undecided, many of whom face multiple barriers to learning including learning difficulties and/ or disabilities. It has a focus on the development of personal and social skills through employability. Learners work towards an NOCN award and then a certificate in developing employment skills. After successfully completing this, they can then move onto a diploma, which is delivered through a work based placement with in-house support for functional skills. The placement typically lasts for 6 months and is supported by a dedicated placement officer.

This has provided a very effective model – a significant number of our Foundation learners are offered work as a direct result of their placement. Those who are either not offered work, or are still not ready for full time work are able to move onto a vocational pathway at level one in the area of their choice.

ELS resources/materials used

Total People used the [Personal Development Profile](#) (PDP), an online tool self-evaluation tool mapped against the National Occupational Standards (NOS) for Learning Support Practitioners (LSPs). The organisation felt this would be of benefit because whilst we provide very good generic training, supported by the Institute for Learning (IFL), staff are working with increasingly complex learners, and we wanted a tool which would help us to identify training needs more closely linked to individual student need.

Our Staff

As a work based learning provider, we do not have Learning Support Practitioners as such. The staff working with our Foundation learners are called either “Trainers” or “Placement officers”. Trainers deliver in-house learning to prepare the individual for the world of work. This includes activities such as preparing CVs, mock interviews, time management, appearance and attitude. Placement officers work with both learners and local employers to match need and support placements. There are 8 placement officers and 12 trainers. We used the Personal Development Profile (PDP) with 14 members of staff, all of whom work with Foundation learning students. This was a combination of trainers, placement officers and Prospect staff, i.e. staff who undertake the same role as placement officers but who work with school based learners aged 14-16.

Introducing the PDP

The LSIS guidance relating to using the tool states that it should be used in an informal atmosphere, where staff have the opportunity to talk to one another, and that it works best when supported by a facilitator. We therefore adopted this approach. As part of the introduction to the tool, the facilitator explained the purpose i.e. that is to identify individual training needs and confidence against the National Occupational Standards, and also that there were no “right and wrong answers”. This was done using a simple PowerPoint, which is also provided, but with plenty of opportunities for questions.

As a work based learning provider, it was also important to explain to staff the importance of interpreting the questions in relation to their working context and job role. The profile, which is linked to the NOS for LSPs, uses the term learning support throughout, which is not one our staff naturally relate to. Staff were asked to respond to all questions in terms of how confident they felt in their role and in relation to the skills described in each question, and to identify where they felt more training would be beneficial.

In addition, our staff work largely in isolation, they neither provide support to nor typically work alongside a tutor. Where questions related to working with others, these were contextualised to reflect the way in which staff, who work with the same learners, communicate to share information and establish effective working practices to support learning.

Part of the reason for our inclusion in the project was to review the relevance and suitability of the tool in a work based learning context. Staff were therefore asked to consider this, as they completed the profile, paying regard not only to the questions but also to the supplementary guidance which is provided in support of them.

Completing the PDP

Following the introduction, staff began to work their way through the PDP, drawing on the supplementary guidance as appropriate. They were able to work at their own pace, and talk freely to one another and/or the facilitator if they had any queries or concerns.

Staff experience of the process

After completing the PDP, the team gathered together to discuss how they had found it and in particular to explore how well the tool translated into a work based learning context. Prior to using it, there had been some concern it might not adequately relate to the role of staff working in a work based learning context. As our staff work largely in isolation, we had anticipated that there may be some sections which they may find difficult to relate to. In practice, this was not the case. Staff were overwhelmingly positive. They also found the additional guidance useful and many drew on this to support them in interpreting the questions. All staff felt that it had been a valuable experience which was effective in supporting them to identify their own training needs more closely. Comments included:

“Useful opportunity to explore areas of development”

“Interesting tool for self-evaluation”

“It helps you understand the demands of the learners you deal with on a daily basis”.

It was also a self-affirming experience, as is evidenced in this comment;

“It helped me to realise how much experience and knowledge I actually have”

Staff valued the way the tool had been implemented, commenting they liked the

“Informal atmosphere, where I feel able to give opinions and look at further support needs”

Critical success factors

- The group size worked well. We could accommodate everyone in one room, so it was a valuable shared experience
- The informal atmosphere was important. Staff felt confident and relaxed in completing the PDP; access to tea, coffee and biscuits also helped.
- Because they were in a group, staff were able to clarify and talk. This led to a lot of relevant discussion, typically related to the needs of the learners and the implications for support.
- Senior management buy in is important. Facilitating time for the staff to meet as a group and placing value on both the activity itself and on staff development more widely is essential.
- To get the most from the process, it needs to be facilitated by someone who understands the purpose of the PDP and, for a work based learning provider, can help contextualise the language so staff can see the relevance to their role.

Outcome

The reports arrived within days of us requesting them. This included individual reports for staff as well as an organisational report summarising outcomes, which has helped us to identify trends. As a management team, we feel the report is a valuable document which has given us very clear pointers for development.

There are two main areas where staff feel further training is required

- Information Communication Technology (ICT)
- Learners along the autistic spectrum, including learners with Asperger Syndrome and those with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

It is interesting to note that while ICT was the area in which the greatest number of staff lacked confidence, the area identified as a priority was for training specifically related to the needs of learners. This confirmed an emerging concern for the management team. In the past we provided much more of this sort of training. The requirement to provide a qualified workforce however has led to a shift in training from a more needs led and flexible programme to one which is largely focussed on the achievement of relevant professional qualifications such as PTLLS, CTLLs and DTLLs. The PDP has given us a very clear basis on which to plan future development activity.

The outcomes have been shared at Senior Management Team meetings and are already being used to inform the training development programme. The internal training and development team are now tasked with identifying training which will address the needs highlighted.

Next steps and future plans

Previously Total People has used a training needs analysis to inform the supervision and appraisal process. The group felt this was a much more thorough tool, and would be keen to see it used on an annual basis. As the PDP was so well received by, and useful to, our Foundation Learning staff, Total people now plans to roll the programme out to mainstream training advisers working with learners at Level 1. We feel this will be very beneficial, as these learners are presenting with increasing challenges and barriers to learning and it is anticipated that the tool will help us to identify and implement relevant training. In the future we intend to use it on an annual basis, so we can see year on year impact.

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