Activity 5: Team research projects

If your learners have successfully completed Activities 1 to 4 in this Employer challenge, they will now be ready to move up a gear and take on a challenging team project.

Team projects will be determined by your learners' needs, the learning context and the syllabus you are following. These guidance notes focus mainly on the co-operative learning aspects of such a project.

In order to capitalise on your learners' knowledge of the ambulance service, you might consider projects that allow them to research how one of the following organisations uses IT and telecoms to save lives and/or solve problems:

- the maritime and coastguard agency (MCA)
- the lifeboat service (RNLI)
- a motoring rescue service
- your local police force
- mountain and cave rescue groups
- regional resilience and response teams.

The team projects will enable learners to develop their use of ICT to capture and present information. This might include use of audio and video, as well as presentation software.

It may also be a good time to introduce your learners to the **SuccessPlanner**, if you have not already done so. This tool supports the co-operative aspects of a project by allowing learners to plan and track both individual and team tasks. The **SuccessPlanner** is located within the Planning toolkit. This can be found on the **Effective teaching and learning** website.

Learning objectives

Learners should be able to:

- improve their research skills
- improve their project management skills
- develop their understanding of co-operative learning
- identify behaviours that help and hinder team work
- improve their ability to listen to others, contribute to team discussions, give and receive feedback and present information.

Plus the objectives that relate to the IT content of the project.

Resources required – all optional

- A set of role cards.
- Access to the **SuccessPlanner**.
- Access to the internet.

- Video and audio recording equipment.
- Presentation software and equipment.

Starting points

Prior to tackling a team project, learners should be familiar with co-operative learning and conducting research as a team. Activities 1 to 4 aim to provide this grounding. However, there are other activities that your learners may have undertaken, both inside and outside the classroom that could provide a similar foundation. This preparation is vital. Learners with little team work experience, or with unhappy experiences of poorly organised group work are likely to lack the skills and confidence to tackle a team project successfully.

Suggested approach

Stage 1: Involving learners in finding suitable projects

Involve the teams in the selection of projects. Encourage them to consider several possibilities, do some preliminary research, and then reach a consensus on which they want to pursue. Time spent on this ensures they have a realistic project that the whole team has bought into.

Stage 2: Planning

Use the **SuccessPlanner** to plan the project.

Stage 3: Task and role allocation

Team research projects work best when team members have two levels of responsibility.

- Task-based: dividing up the research and giving everyone a chunk that they are responsible for.
- Role-based: taking on a team role to help the team function effectively, for example, minute taker, time keeper or discussion leader.

Team members may have several team roles and these may change as the project progresses. The Co-operative learning area of the IT resources suggests over 20 possible team roles.

Consider setting up a system for enhancing individual scores if everyone in the team completes their work successfully. This helps learners see that they are responsible for the whole team's learning, not just their own.

Stage 4: During the research

Co-operative learning should mirror high achieving teams in the workplace. There should be a positive atmosphere, good communication flow, a clear sense of direction, energy and motivation, and no unnecessary stress or anxiety.

Encourage teams to:

- call for 'team time' when necessary so they can adjourn to team base to resolve problems and hold discussions
- use graphic organisers and other techniques to help create highly structured and focused team discussions
- support team effort through positive promotive interaction: coaching, encouraging, motivating and supporting each other
- feel accountable to each other and the teacher; they should not shy away from asking each other to account for themselves, and the teacher should be able to receive a clear account of what the team or individual has done and learned (you might even consider springing short tests on teams to check their understanding of their topic)
- as far as possible, take responsibility for all aspects of the team's work, only turning to the teacher when they have run out of ideas or face intractable problems.

Stage 5: Group processing

It is important that teams constantly review how well they are working together. They will get better at group processing the more they use it and see the benefits. This does not mean wallowing in self-recrimination or psychological explanations. It is all about developing a professional approach to team work, where teams are prepared to reflect on what is helping or hindering them and use that information to move the team forward.

You might consider reinforcing this aspect of co-operative learning by rewarding good team citizenship.

Differentiation to meet individual needs

Co-operative learning offers a particularly effective approach to differentiation, as it is built on the principle that the individual matters as much as the team. A properly implemented co-operative approach ensures that individual needs are never lost sight of. The team is there to help everyone achieve their potential. Team success grows out of individual achievement.
Co-operative learning teams should be as diverse as possible, opening up possibilities for supporting less confident learners and integrating learners with disabilities.

The activities in this resource have a measure of flexibility built in and they can cater for learners at different levels.