

# Work-based learning meets prison learning

## A4e and Poultec



### Introduction

The A4e Education team at HMP Wayland and teaching staff from Poultec Training, both LSIS improvement partners from different spheres of education, are collaborating to share practice and develop the skills of staff.

One of the dangers of working in a closed, prison environment is that, as a tutor, you face inwards and don't always take notice of the changing world of education, and particularly work-based learning, beyond the gate. Similarly those working in the community are often curious about the education provision offered to offenders behind the prison walls. A4e and Poultec have had an opportunity to glimpse at one another's world and this has led to some exciting development opportunities.

### Collaboration between improvement partners:

A4e Training:

- Lorna Poll

Poultec:

- Rachel Öner



When Poultec and A4e Managers found themselves at an LSIS event and, almost casually at first, began to compare practice across the two organisations, they realised that they had more in common than they had originally thought. For example, both organisations had been grappling with the introduction of functional skills, effective e-learning activities and the challenge of providing invigorating and relevant professional development for staff. More excitingly, they realised that there was a lot that they could learn from one another. So under the LSIS Support Programme a number of visits and joint training events were planned.

### An agenda for collaboration

After a visit to HMP Wayland the initial three areas of common interest were confirmed as:

- personal development planning for staff developing embedded functional skills;
- e-portfolios;
- developing contextualised teaching materials.

## **Joint continuous professional development (CPD) initiatives**

Two of tutors from HMP Wayland tested the water in February with the first peer observations by visiting Poultec Training Centre to observe maths and ICT learning sessions. They described the experience as 'excellent'. These staff were able to spend time reviewing and sharing resources after the lessons and there have been subsequent email exchanges directing them to helpful websites.

Managers in learning providers are all concerned about planning continuous professional development and improving teaching and learning. Having a training day out of a prison establishment to review the changes to the Common Inspection Framework and hear about another organisation's response to this, as well as having the opportunity to reflect on our own practice was described as "one of the most useful training sessions I have attended" by one of the participants.

The third event centred on e-portfolios. Prisons are notoriously behind the times when it comes to e-learning because of the very necessary security constraints around internet access. However, e-portfolios will soon be the order of the day within the learning and skills sector and A4e staff are aware they need to adapt to use these safely and securely. The installation of Virtual Campus in most prisons means that a secure, web-based platform is a reality, so the training session to look at Poultec's e-portfolios was timely and one participant described it as "the LLN Support Programme at its best".

## **Impact**

Each of the shared training days had a positive 'buzz'. Teachers like to be able to discuss their ideas, reflect on local practice and to see that they were not alone in struggling with some of the issues associated with teaching in offender settings. What better way to do this than to talk to those who encounter similar problems in different circumstances? Work-based learning tutors often are faced with difficult teaching environments, competing priorities and an extended year. They have to be flexible and their teaching strategies must be versatile, practical and engaging. Every person involved in this collaboration has commented with enthusiasm on the value and relevance of seeing teaching and learning from a slightly different perspective and having a greater understanding of the bigger world of English, maths and ESOL teaching.

## **Outcomes so far**

- Three establishments are reviewing the way they present the staffing profile as a visual summary of qualifications, experience and training needs.
- A4e has identified the need for a strategy for using and transferring e-portfolios across prisons and into the community using Virtual Campus and have set a date for this to be in place.

## **Next Steps**

These events are just the start of a longer-term collaboration between the two organisations. Our next steps are:

- A joint CPD event to look specifically at contextualised teaching and learning materials.
- Visits to share practice, for example a Poultec staff member plans to visit HMP Bure to see the barbering facility there.

- Poultec and A4e Managers will meet to consider how we sustain and develop this model of cross sector partnership working as, although it is early days, the benefits are clear.

## **Final thoughts**

- Although the prison sector has particular needs and constraints, such a lot can be learned from others, particularly those within work-based learning.
- Share good practice across prisons, rather than just within the individual establishments.
- Senior Management commitment is essential from the start of any work.
- Share the resources that all tutors have identified as useful as this saves time and money.