

Functional skills in a voluntary and community setting

Spark Educare



Who we are

Spark Educare is a voluntary and community organisation based in South Reading, Berkshire. It has strong links with Reading Borough Council, Reading College and New Directions and is a registered centre for functional skills tests. Among other things, we run Citizens' Skills Training for 16-24 year olds and we are a centre for UK Online.

The priorities for our improvement project:

- increase our understanding of the assessment process: both initial and diagnostic;
- improve the planning of individual learning;
- ensure individual learning plans are robust and truly individual;
- raise awareness of individual learning needs, including dyslexia and ESOL.

Through the improvement project we also aimed to upskill our teaching staff and increase their confidence to present a positive image to learners.

What did we achieve?

The teaching staff took ideas and models and created their own bespoke resources. This included a new format for individual learning plans. This has, in turn, led to the creation of more meaningful learning activities and better session planning. By using the new initial assessment and ILP process it is hoped that the success rate will increase and that learners will achieve within planned timescales. We are also trialling new numeracy resources and using staff meetings to cascade information to staff. We are noticing that our new approach raises learner confidence and equips them better for employment and life.

Impact on our organisation

Working with our support partner has acted as an eye opener. As a result of this increased awareness the organisation will be able to build a reputation for providing functional skills. We now feel that we are on the right track and intend in the near future to add functional skills to our curriculum offer.

Supported provider

Spark Educare:

- Patience Akemche, Skills for Life Coordinator

Improvement partner

East Berkshire College:

- Helen Cook, Functional Skills

Our improvement partner

East Berkshire College was part of the functional skills pilot for the full three years and began delivering functional skills from the first year of 'going live'. They were able to show us tried and tested models which we could adapt to our learners.

"I have been very impressed with the willingness to take on board suggestions and implement them immediately so as not to lose impetus."

Helen Cook, East Berkshire College

Top tips from the improvement partner

- Bespoke support is paramount, so listen to the provider you are supporting and work very closely with them.
- Be SMART and do not be tempted to go off on too many tangents. There is not time.
- Use an action research approach. After providing input, allow time for the supported provider to apply their new knowledge through practical activity.