

Embedding English, maths and ESOL in curriculum delivery

Supported provider: Valkyrie Support Services

Improvement partner: Dianne Robinson, LSIS Associate



Valkyrie Support Services

Summary

Sue Morgan and Richard Hicks from Valkyrie Support Services submitted a request for three days support from the LSIS support programme using their virtual account in August 2012. The focus for the package was for advice and support on the delivery of functional skills within their vocational programmes and Apprenticeship frameworks.

Introduction

Valkyrie Support Services, based in Beamhurst near Uttoxeter in Staffordshire, is a provider of Apprenticeships and work based learning programmes. They are primarily lean specialists but also deliver a full range of qualifications, mainly to the manufacturing industry. Their core programmes are:

- Improving Operational Performance; and
- Food Manufacturing Excellence.

These are delivered at local, regional and national level. In addition, Valkyrie has recently included Training, Assessment and Quality Assurance (TAQA) and Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS) qualifications to their portfolio.

Valkyrie Support Services cover both the East and West Midlands, but also go further afield when necessary. Learners come from all different backgrounds with approximately 25 per cent who are second language speakers. The majority of learners are over twenty-five.

Demographic breakdown

16-18 year olds	10 per cent
19-24 year olds	30 per cent
25 plus	60 per cent

Valkyrie Support Services always look to the future and continuous improvement. They are currently in the process of applying for reaccreditation of the Matrix Award.

What we wanted to achieve

Support was built on the progress achieved during the Language, Literacy and Numeracy support programme in 2011-2012, with the following themes identified for future development.

- To prepare staff with sufficient skills and understanding to deliver functional skills.
- To offer an embedded approach to functional skills.
- To offer a meaningful qualification to prepare learners for the work environment and society.

Sue Morgan identified clear steps in the LSIS action plan with SMART targets which enabled Valkyrie Support Services to continue to progress with their whole organisation approach to embedding functional skills. The belief in a whole organisation approach was replicated throughout the workforce. Both Sue and Richard fully appreciated that success would only be achieved if all staff were on board from the onset.

Implementation

Sue and Richard decided to be proactive and opted to deliver functional skills sooner rather than later and started delivery in September 2012. Tutors/assessors were therefore keenly aware of the different pedagogical approaches needed to develop the problem solving skills of their learners. They actively welcomed the opportunity to develop their knowledge and understanding of effective functional skills delivery.

Valkyrie had received support from the LSIS programme the previous year. In fact, Sue delivered an informative and enthusiastic presentation at the Birmingham LSIS conference in June 2012. She explained that to embed functional skills into vocational learning, it was important to develop a structured approach for the delivery of functional skills and clearly identified the stages that this involved. This inevitably laid the foundations for the next package of support and enabled Valkyrie to have clearly defined objectives. These objectives logically followed on from their previous action plan. The main themes for 2012-2013 were as follows.

Main themes for 2012-2013

- To increase quality through a whole organisational approach to embedding English, maths and ICT.
- To further develop the skills of the vocational tutor/assessors.
- To extend the repertoire of resources to support the delivery of functional skills.
- To improve the English and maths skills of all staff.
- To produce a functional skills good practice guide to aid delivery.

In order to achieve effective embedding and ensure mastery of functional skills, this was to be seen as a golden thread weaving through all aspects of provision and wholeheartedly embraced throughout the organisation.

Objectives were set using a range of tools such as the LSIS health check, self-assessment review, an audit of provision and the previous action plan. This enabled Sue to prioritise the support needed within the set period along with further actions if time/funding permitted. As tutors/assessors were already delivering functional skills, it was relatively easy to identify appropriate and relevant CPD sessions. In order to ensure maximum attendance, the LSIS training sessions were delivered on staff meeting days that took place on a monthly basis.

What we did

Sue Morgan, who has extensive experience of embedding Skills for Life into vocational programmes, recognised that although much has been achieved through the 2011-2012 LSIS support programme, further work was needed to reflect a whole organisation approach.

The focus of the current LSIS three day support package was:

- developing all staff in terms of their own English and maths skills;
- the production of a good practice guide to successful teaching and learning of functional skills; and
- increasing the existing bank of functional skills teaching and learning resources.

Valkyrie not only wanted to support their entire workforce to achieve level two English and maths, but also to improve the confidence of those involved in functional skills delivery. Workshops in both English and maths for all staff were identified to assist the process. The workshops would address both teaching and learning strategies and provide an opportunity to improve personal skills. Furthermore, as staff training days are held on the second Tuesday of every month, this provided the ideal opportunity to ensure maximum attendance. The focus of each workshop was to embrace an embedded approach to all delivery programmes. In addition to this tutor/assessors, who do not hold teaching qualifications, were encouraged to attend the in house PTLLS course that is delivered by Sue. Valkyrie Support Services believe in “growing their own staff” whenever possible.

Valkyrie has a successful, dedicated and highly motivated workforce: a real asset to the organisation, particularly when introducing new aspects of the programme. Tutor/assessors who had previously been delivering key skills welcomed the opportunity to develop their own skills and knowledge. The rationale for the two CPD sessions, delivered by the LSIS consultant, was not only to support tutor/assessors in up skilling their delivery of English and maths but also to maximise opportunities for learners to achieve mastery of functional skills. The workshop topics were:

Workshop topic one	Workshop topic two
A Teaching Toolkit which included strategies, hints and tips on teaching and learning of English. This incorporated aspects of communication, reading, writing and spelling. Tutor/assessors commented that they particularly enjoyed finding out about differing learning styles and more specifically the kinaesthetic approach.	A Teaching Toolkit which included hints and tips on teaching and learning of maths. This incorporated the language of maths, error analyses, fractions and decimals from a problem solving perspective. Tutor/assessors were enthusiastic, not only to extend their bank of teaching and learning approaches but also wanted to provide opportunities to stretch and challenge their learners.

Following on from the CPD sessions, the next logical stage was to explore the planning aspect of embedding. Sue and Richard believed that it is essential to invest time into this essential area in order to provide a sound basis from which to identify activities which would maximise the functional skills approach. Four stages were followed as part of this process.

Stage one	Stage two
<p>Staff mapped all of their vocational courses to the core curriculum during whole team workshops. This involved matching specific skills to the appropriate levels in the literacy and numeracy curriculum. Clearly, there was much to cover if all programmes were to reflect an embedded approach. Consequently, this took place over several staff meetings.</p> <p>This activity enabled tutor/assessors to have a deeper understanding of the content of the curricula, and to explore how this relates to their vocational sector.</p>	<p>Lesson plans were referenced to the literacy and numeracy core curriculum. Time was allocated for this activity, providing the opportunity for staff to identify where English and maths skills naturally occur within the vocational areas. Tutor/assessors were acutely aware that referencing alone was not sufficient, and that they needed to delve into the curricula in order to harvest useful and relevant activities.</p> <p>The next phase was earmarking how functional skills could be developed in order to ensure transferability and ultimately mastery.</p>
Stage three	Stage four
<p>The team produced differentiated teaching and learning strategies to support their lessons, using the English and maths and core curricula in addition to Access for All. This was very much an ongoing process and reflective practice takes place after each lesson.</p> <p>Staff firmly believe that learners need to be aware of the requisite English and maths skills for success in their vocational courses.</p>	<p>The next activity was the continued development of a bank of teaching and learning resources to support functional skills delivery utilising a variety of websites such as the Excellence Gateway, awarding organisations, Edmodo and production of in house materials.</p> <p>Valkyrie fully believes that it is essential for all staff to take ownership of the embedding process for effective delivery. Sue and Richard make every effort to support their workforce in achieving this.</p>

Peer exchange visit

Stoke on Trent College were keen to visit a work based learning provider as part of their LSIS support package. They particularly wanted to meet a provider who had made progress with delivering functional skills in an Apprenticeship framework. When they specifically requested a visit to Valkyrie Support Services, Sue and Richard were very happy to host this.

Chris Capper – English and Maths Team Leader, and Anthony Pointon -Assistant Director in Employer Engagement (both from Stoke College) attended what proved to be a highly useful meeting. Topics covered included the following.

- Delivery models.
- Staff qualifications in the light of the Lingfield report.
- CPD.
- Awarding Organisations - pros and cons.
- Assessment tools - advantages and disadvantages.
- Resources and much, much more.

Chris commented that, “Sue and Richard were extremely helpful, sharing good practice and discussing their delivery with small groups. It was good to see how others recruit both staff and students, and that their learners were ‘wanting to do’ and willing to pay for their qualifications.”

“I found the advice and guidance offered by Valkyrie to be informative, valid and credible. I would particularly like to record my appreciation for their candour and willingness to unreservedly share their hard gained experience with the College. I think the discussion firmed up some of my own thoughts and clarified the issues around planning, staff development and the holistic approach to the delivery of functional skills in order to establish an effective programme,” added Anthony Pointon.

Outcomes and impacts

What we achieved

- The support had a positive effect on staff; they were more confident in their delivery of functional skills.
- All staff gained a deeper understanding of the implications of effective embedding of functional skills.
- A range of functional skills teaching and learning resources were developed.

What we learned

- The CPD sessions gave staff a variety of different strategies about how to teach English and maths so that we were able to build on our existing strategies, approaches and resources. It is important to continually review and build on existing resources.
- Support all staff to grow and develop whenever possible.
- The workshops were interactive so all could share best practice. It is important to celebrate the good teaching and learning that already exists within our highly motivated workforce, and to develop this in a meaningful way.
- Set regular, timetabled meetings to provide opportunities to review progress and share resources.

What we are taking forward

Staff requested in-house workshops on the marking criteria for functional skills, in order for everyone to have good understanding about how papers are marked and where extra points can be gained. This knowledge will be then taught to the learners to ensure they not only have mastery about the subjects, but are also aware how they will be marked.

Contact information

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