

Functional skills in work-based learning: making it work

Central Training



Introduction

Central Training, based in Wigan, delivers training programmes across a wide range of vocational areas across the United Kingdom. Central Training works with many large employers, local authorities, leisure trusts and a range of sporting organisations including Wigan Warriors, St Helens Rugby League Football Club, League Football Education and gymnastics clubs. Central Training employs 97 staff to manage, deliver and quality assure the courses they provide.

Introducing functional skills in apprenticeship frameworks

The introduction of functional skills in English, maths and ICT in apprenticeships to replace Key Skills in 2012 was a challenge that the management team acknowledged needed significant planning. The five-strong functional skills team, managed by Selma Cruickshank, clearly had a key role to play in the implementation of a 'whole organisation approach' to functional skills. However, the management team understood that all staff would need to work collaboratively to ensure that apprentices, foundation learners and all other trainees undertaking functional skills qualifications would receive support to develop their 'functionality' in English, maths and ICT.

Building on previous years' development work

Selma and the team had worked in previous years with LSIS-funded Skills for Life support to prepare for the introduction of functional skills and embed English and maths into vocational programmes. As part of this work, they had designed posters, which illustrated the types of activities including English, maths or ICT that, for example, chefs or sports leaders undertook.

Central Training's managers recognised, however, that vocational trainers and assessors were still finding it very difficult to help learners independently undertake tasks using English, maths or ICT, a key requirement for functional skills assessments. In particular, they needed to help learners:

- develop problem solving approaches
- learn through application
- acquire process skills as well as knowledge

Supported provider

Central Training Group:

- Selma Cruickshank, Functional Skills Manager

Improvement partner

Training Plus Merseyside:

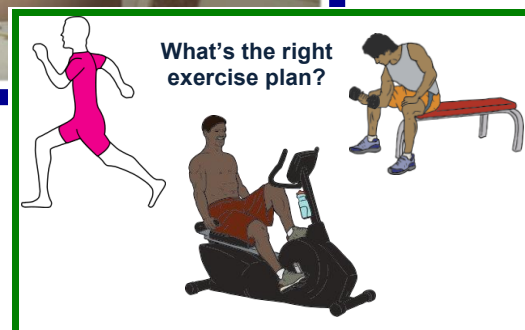
- Claire Collins, Development Adviser

- develop transferable skills

With this understanding, Selma and the functional skills team requested support from Training Plus Merseyside, an LSIS improvement partner, to; “enable non-specialists (eg assessors) to develop confidence and competence to support learners’ English, maths and ICT development on every programme”. (Central Training’s ‘Support for LLN’ action plan, 2011 /12).

As well as facilitating the development of an action plan, Claire Collins, Central Training’s allocated Development Adviser, worked with the functional skills team to design a training session for their vocational colleagues. They wished to include the following:

- build on the ‘skills bubbles’ designed in previous years and stress that functional skills is about situating those ‘skills’ in the context of tasks to do or problems to solve;
- review the ‘learner journey’ (assessment process) to ensure that learners’ abilities to use English, maths and ICT to solve problems/ undertake tasks was monitored throughout their programme;
- share and develop new ‘functional skills’ flashcards – visual prompts that had been developed by another training provider, Scientiam, receiving support from Claire. The idea of the flashcards was that assessors could use open questions, in the context of a realistic work-place problem/ scenario, to determine whether learners understood the processes required to solve a problem or carry out a task.



Questions used with flashcards to draw out learners’ abilities to use English, maths and ICT functionally:

- What’s the problem that you need to solve?
- What information do you need to solve it?
- What are some possible solutions?
- Choose a solution and explain step by step what you would do.
- How would you check if your answer is correct?

Underpinning English, maths and ICT development

During the initial training session, assessors, vocational trainers and the functional skills team agreed that they needed a common set of resources and approaches to help learners develop underpinning English, maths and ICT abilities. Despite having specialist English and maths teachers working at Central Training, the number of learners and their dispersed locations means that assessors must be equipped to support their learning needs. The functional skills team, as specialist English, maths and ICT teachers led on the creation of a resource menu, outlining key topics for learners to work on, along with suggested resources to meet varied learning styles and ideas for assessment.

Scheme of Work (maths Level 1)		
Topic	Resources	Assessment
Use whole numbers and negative numbers in practical contexts	Card activity, Negative numbers worksheet 1	kitchen fridges
Add and subtract whole numbers using a range of mental methods	BBC Skillswise (calculation) – factsheets/ worksheets	office stationery budget
Multiply and divide whole numbers using a range of mental methods	$\times \div$ card matching, worksheet and online interactions	working out my wages
Use equivalences between common fractions, decimals and percentages	equivalences matching wall, worksheets, SfL interactive tasks	the best price?

Next steps

The development work is on-going at Central Training. As a next step, the functional skills team are working on the functional skills assessment process, including the following:

- Developing an individual learning plan (ILP) that is fit for purpose.
- Planning how to track learners' process.
- Setting learning targets that are appropriate to the individual.