

CASE STUDY: WEST YORKSHIRE LEARNING PROVIDERS (WYLP)

ALEX MARTIN – OCTOBER 2017





Background

West Yorkshire Learning Providers (WYLP) is a network-based learning provider which currently has 65 members. It was graded 'good' (2) by Ofsted in 2014. WYLP supports member organisations with the delivery of apprenticeships and employment and skills provision. Although independent skills providers make up 90 per cent of its client base, its membership also includes Further Education Colleges, local authorities, and third sector and community organisations. All member organisations deliver a wide range of vocational courses including health and fitness, accountancy, management, hairdressing, and health and social care, which are all work-based or apprenticeships. The size of the member organisations varies from 18 to 1,600 learners. WYLP also sits on a number of boards, such as the local authority's 14-16 skills group, to keep up-to-date with policy developments and represent its members.

Understanding the role of advanced practitioners

The WYLP network has one 'Quality Coordinator' who is overseen by an 'Operations Director', both of which act as advanced practitioners to network members. In addition, each member of WYLP will have at least one member-based Quality Coordinator who works within their provider. Member-based Quality Coordinators are responsible for their organisation's Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) and staff development. They conduct walkthroughs, observations, assessments, ensure recording practices are being employed, and organise staff development in line with WYLP's standardised quality processes and recommendations.

WYLP is the overall authority for quality in the network, thus sets the standard for quality, creating standardised processes, providing the CPD, and conducting monitoring for all contracted member organisations. In order to do so, it's Quality Coordinator oversees the training of member-based Quality Coordinators, identifies common development themes within the network, supports member-based Quality Coordinators in their role, and conducts 'mock-steds': an audit carried out in line with the Common Inspection Framework (CIF).



We act as consultant, we act as a critical friend, and we act as their support service for the members and particularly the providers we contract with.

WYLP Senior Manager

It's given me more confidence, more knowledge in the areas that I've needed.

Senior Manager/Member-based Quality coordinator

It means somebody who can take responsibility and be accountable for what's being delivered, making sure the right standards are being met, that we're meeting the requirements of the Common Inspection Framework, what our learners need and what our funders need.

Member-based Quality Coordinator

The position of member-based Quality Coordinators varies, but tends to be within management. In addition, member-based Quality Coordinators usually take on more than one role within their provider, for example, a business owner, general manager, senior manager, associate director, and one individual who is transitioning from assessor to being responsible for quality. All but one of the member-based Quality Coordinators still taught. Consequently, opinions about whether the role of a member-based Quality Coordinator is a peer or management facing role varied, with one participant expressing that they were 'split 50/50'. WYLP itself does not promote the role as one or the other.

Both member-based and WYLP-based Quality Coordinators take on a generalist role as it would not be viable to employ subject-specialists on account of the wide variety of courses offered across the network. Quality Coordinators, tutors and senior managers all viewed this positively, as they feel that pedagogy and learner improvement was being observed against objective criteria.



They're [WYLP's Quality Coordinator] observing our teaching and learning, not specifically the subject. It's about what I've taught and has the learner learnt something. So, in a way, they don't need to know the specifics of what we're teaching they just need to know – have I taught them something and was it a good session?

Tutor

Because they're not subject specialists, they're sticking to the criteria. And you get that complete validation that every time an audit is done, regardless of the vocational area, the outcome and criteria being used are the same.

Member-based Quality Coordinator

WYLP also informs members about Ofsted guidelines, such as for CIF, Prevent, equality and diversity, and maths and English, as well as any emerging legislation, guidelines or responsibilities. Members find this service immensely helpful, as some of them are fairly small organisations that do not have the resources to carry out this research themselves.



Everything we need to know WYLP carry the torch... they seem to know everything before anybody else does.

Member-based Quality Coordinator

It's about the constant level of support, the relationships which we've built with the team there. They respond to any questions or needs we have, that there's always that backup there if we need it. We get reassurance that they're so on the ball with knowing what's happening, even before it's happened. We really feel that they're a way to keep up to date with things, when we're so busy on a daily basis doing delivery we also know that we're not missing a trick with what else is happening around us, so we can plan ahead in time.

Member-based Quality Coordinator

Activities

WYLP is responsible for a number of different activities across the network, this includes:

- Training member-based Quality Coordinators.
- Signposting and providing targeted CPD suitable for work-based learning.
- Carrying out audits across the network, followed by feedback.
- Updating members on the latest guidance and regulations.
- Ensuring standardised quality processes across the network.

At a network level, member-based Quality Coordinators can contact WYLP at any time for assistance or clarification, or invite it to carry out an observation. WYLP shares key resources throughout the network, as well as providing and signposting relevant CPD. It has a full observation strategy, which means fewer observations for providers who are consistently rated as good or excellent. Furthermore, when new legislation or guidelines are introduced, such as Prevent, thematic walkthroughs are conducted at all organisations, regardless of grade.



I've learnt so much in terms of quality, because it's made me understand about my own organisation more. In terms of our strengths and weaknesses, pulling it all together, how we can move forward with teaching and learning, how we can make it interesting.

Senior Manager/Member-based Quality coordinator

During a 'mock-sted', WYLP will employ the full Common Inspection Framework, which includes the assessment of Teaching, Learning and Assessment; Leadership and Management; Personal Development, Behaviour and Welfare (PDBW); Outcomes. These assess the taught subject, embedding of English and maths, Prevent, and equality and diversity. WYLP reviews all relevant records, such as learner portfolios, to assess whether standardised recording techniques are being employed. In addition, its staff talk to learners and employers to understand their insights. The evidence is then collated and assessed against the Common Inspection Framework.



You have so much to cover that sometimes it's really hard to remember what you've got down on paper. One thing that they've picked up on is that we're great at doing it but not so great at writing it.

Tutor

They [WYLP] also do a "mock sted" and look at the things Ofsted would check on. So without that and without the teaching observation and feedback then we wouldn't be as good now would we?

Tutor

At the end of a mock-sted, WYLP's Quality Coordinator provides one-to-one feedback to tutors and member-based Quality Coordinators, and draws up an action plan. This is followed up by a final report sent via email. The member-based Quality Coordinator is then responsible for implementing the action plan before the next observation. WYLP provides member-based Quality Coordinators with further assistance and resources to implement the action plan effectively.



They've [WYLP] certainly made us all think about which way we're going to go, how we're going to deliver and how we're going to make it interesting.

Senior Manager/Member-based Quality coordinator

Every time they [tutors] receive feedback from WYLP, they really appreciate it and reflect on their own practice. And then they'll look at what WYLP sent to get an idea about what to deliver in the next session to move forward. They take everything on board – it's part of their own CPD isn't it?

Senior Manager/Member-based Quality coordinator

WYLP has three groups which work to ensure quality throughout the network: The Teaching and Learning Improvement Group (TALI), which identifies common themes which can be addressed throughout the network and sets the strategic direction for quality; The Moderation Group, which assesses each organisation's Observation of Teaching and Learning (OTL) reports; and the Embed group, which comes up with ideas on how to embed English and maths, functional skills, equality and diversity, and Prevent.

A select number of member-based Quality Coordinators have a more hands on role in the network. For instance, one is a member of WYLP's board, carries out observations at other organisations, and is part of the Moderation Group, and TALI.



If there's something that comes across that you actually think "that needs to be shared across the wider network with WYLP", then we'll put CPD activities on and do them across the WYLP network.

Member-based Quality Coordinator

At an organisational level, the channels tutors use to access support vary. For instance, in a small organisation with three part-time staff and 60 learners, developmental support is given in one-to-one meetings, and by email and telephone; in a medium-sized organisation with 18 staff and a 220 learner capacity, developmental support is given to assessors in a group session; in a large organisation with a learner capacity of 2,000, developmental support is given via internal group CPD sessions organised by a designated employee development manager, and best practice documents are shared on the organisation's intranet.



We're involved in helping support the tutors to further develop their skills, and being able to deliver what's needed to the various groups we have coming in.

Member-based Quality Coordinator

Capability

A lot of CPD on offer in the sector is designed for classroom-based teaching, whereas WYLP's members conduct work-based teaching. Consequently, staff at WYLP will sometimes attend a course and then re-package it in a way that it is suitable for the needs of its members.

Training provided to member-based Quality Coordinators by WYLP includes conducting OTLAs, and embedding English and maths, equality and diversity, and Prevent. These sessions can be externally sourced, such as observation training by an ex-Ofsted employee, or provided directly by

WYLP, such as a course on Prevent and how to embed it. These courses are supported by resources, such as a key ring with ideas and strategies on how to embed initiatives. WYLP has collaborated with Bradford College to develop courses, and signposts external CPD which it thinks will be useful for its members. However, members have to fund these courses themselves and are under no obligation to attend them as part of standardised quality practice. As part of their training, member-based Quality Coordinators are invited to shadow observations conducted by WYLP's own Quality Coordinator.



They will also come and carry out joint observations with us, so we can keep ourselves on top of our game to ensure that we're delivering the highest quality we possibly can.

Member-based Quality Coordinator

Outcomes

As illustrated above, member organisations are closely monitored by WYLP's quality team and progress is tracked from observation to observation. WYLP's Quality Coordinator will issue key dates throughout the year which outlines when things are expected to be put into action. This is one way of tracking organisational progress.

In the past, some of WYLP's member organisations have employed other individuals or organisations to perform a similar role. However, they have noticed a positive change in quality since contracting with WYLP. This has been attributed to sector knowledge, resources, competency and their independence as an external body. Regarding the latter, one Quality Coordinator noted that staff are more likely to be receptive to feedback. Alongside this, they have seen a significant increase in staff taking up training offers since they have contracted WYLP to undertake quality audits.



I could be saying exactly the same thing, but because it's somebody independent, and somebody who is working for a similar organisation, there is no misunderstanding that they are not aware what the job role is.

Senior Manager/Member-based Quality Coordinator

We have managed to keep a consistent good through Ofsted, which we wouldn't probably have had if we hadn't had the support from WYLP.

Tutor

Shared learning

WYLP was keen to stress that independent sector organisations operate differently to others, such as FE colleges. Consequently, it has worked to apply the advanced practitioner role in a way which is conducive to work-based learning. As organisations within the independent sector can be small, they can have less capacity and time to implement up-to-date quality processes as standalone organisations. By being part of a network, smaller organisations can quickly share best practice and knowledge with each other. Furthermore, a network allows common or emerging development themes to be identified and relevant and timely CPD to be designed and delivered.



Being part of the consortium means that we have access to our other colleagues who do provision, who are also going through the same process. So we're all going through similar challenges and we all have our own ideas which we can share with each other.

Member-based Quality Coordinator

Quality Coordinators expressed that quality needs to be a core focus within every organisation. This means getting staff on-board and giving people the time and resources they need to develop.



You've got to get buy-in from your staff, and they've got to realise that it's not a big stick that you're managing them by. Because if the quality's there, it drives everything else. Not one of my staff thinks I'm there to dictate, there's just pride that the quality is there.

Senior Manager/Member-based Quality Coordinator

If somebody has the time to develop themselves and develop others it makes it a lot easier moving forward.

Senior Manager/Member-based Quality Coordinator



Top tips for learning providers

- Independent learning providers, especially smaller ones, often do not have capacity and time keep up-to-date with emerging guidelines and regulations. A network can be a useful way of keeping up-to-date with developments in the sector.
- Standardised quality processes should be applied across the network.
- The independence of WYLP increases validity among staff.
- Work-based learning organisations need bespoke quality, teaching and learning advice and CPD.