Organising and managing flexible delivery

Leicestershire Adult Learning Service: Developing models of delivery

Background

The Provider

We are an Adult Learning Service working on the urban fringe and a variety of rural areas across the county. Provision is primarily in the form of 30-week roll-on, roll-off courses in a variety of venues. However, we recognised that we were unable to meet the needs of all our potential learners. In this connection we bid for, and received, an LSIS Action Research Development grant to enable the relevant development work to take place. The aim of the project was to build the foundation to develop a high quality blended learning approach including use of a Moodle based VLE to record learning and provide timely feedback to learners (for Literacy L1 and 2 and Numeracy E3- L2).

What we did

Considerable time was spent on investigating funding, staff development and development of our Moodle VLE. The blended learning approach was trialled with a small number of learners. A dedicated pool of tutors were given additional hours to work with a caseload of learners and learners were allocated to their personal tutor. Tutors contacted learners and arranged a mutually convenient meeting place and time.

Things we learnt

Tutors

- Need to be willing and able to work flexibly and with a good degree of autonomy.

- Need to have email address / mobile phone to enable responsiveness to learners.

- Need local knowledge for setting up appropriate face-to-face meetings. Libraries were frequently used, as there is a partnership agreement with our service. Workplace not always appropriate due to confidentiality issues.

- Allowed to claim six hours' pay per learner. Need to record how time used. Tutors offset time used for 'quicker/slower' learners so averaged out at six hours each.

Feedback from tutors has been very positive. They have enjoyed the opportunity of working flexibly 1:1 with learners and are keen to continue with this work into the next academic year.

Learners

- Be selective, not an appropriate route for all.

- Must be at least E3 numeracy or L1 literacy.

- Good face-to-face initial assessment with thorough diagnostics essential to establish rapport and set parameters.

- Need to be motivated and able to work independently.

- If using e-learning need to check IT skills, don't make assumptions regarding accessibility of materials.

- Enjoy having a personal tutor. Feedback has been very positive.

Comments from our on course evaluations included:

'A great way to learn.'

'Easier that I thought possible.'

'Couldn't have done it any other way, impossible to attend a class as I'm a single mum.'

Teaching and learning

- Must be focused with clear targets, deadlines and end dates. If learners not meeting deadlines we suggest this is addressed with ultimatums. Responsiveness needs to be two-way.

- Invite learners in to taught group sessions when appropriate or offer small group tutorials.

- Not all learners want e-learning.

- Maths book 'Maths – The Basic Skills' is available on loan to learners for duration of course and is an invaluable resource. Book offers clear explanations with lots of self-checking practice.

- It appears easier to deliver numeracy than literacy remotely. It is easier to identify problem areas and for learners to self-check answers.

Management

- Tutors need good induction and support in the initial stages of delivery.

- Needs careful management in terms of co-ordination and caseloading.

- Recruitment is in the ratio of 70:30% numeracy: literacy.

- Caseloading needs to take into account viable distances for tutors/learners to travel to face-to-face meetings.

What next?

- Keep an eye on funding to ensure still viable.

- Develop tutor pool. Ideally we would like a tutor in each area with hours to deliver through blended learning.

- Tutor contracts for next year. Allow hours within fractional contracts of designated tutors. Negotiate with sessional tutors.

- Evaluate and develop resources.

- Develop links with voluntary e-learning champions who may enhance learning experience for our learners.

Final thoughts

This is a small case study consisting of 22 learners recruited to date. We have only lost one learner and many have already achieved a qualification, therefore we expect our success rate to be good.