

# Support for Literacy, Language and Numeracy Programme

## Case study – Dawn Hodge Associates Ltd

### Vocational trainers take ownership of LLN on Apprenticeship programmes



#### Introducing Dawn Hodge Associates Ltd

Dawn Hodge Associates Ltd (DHA) is a work-based learning provider with its head office in Neston, Cheshire. DHA primarily delivers health and social care qualifications across the North West of England. Learners work in a range of care settings, with all training and assessment taking place in learners' workplaces. Most learners work towards qualifications at Levels 2, 3 and 4. DHA has a small management team that supports a programme delivery team of five full-time and one part-time member of staff.

#### Starting point

Historically, DHA delivered only employer-responsive provision, primarily Train to Gain and European Social Fund projects. Although the team carried out initial assessments to determine learners' literacy and numeracy levels, they did not directly support learners to develop literacy, language or numeracy (LLN) skills. Learners with identified needs were signposted and referred to other local providers. This model worked well for DHA. They were inspected by Ofsted for the first time in October 2010 and inspectors reported that "the quality of training and assessment is outstanding" and "assessors are inspirational" (Ofsted, October 2010). DHA was awarded Grade 1 for every aspect of their provision. Concerns about current success rates and quality were certainly not the reasons why DHA applied to join the Support for LLN Programme!

The starting point for DHA was the strategic change of direction from Train to Gain delivery to Apprenticeship delivery, as stated in their Business Plan and Self-assessment Report (SAR) for 2010/11.

From January 2011 a new Apprenticeship framework for adult social care was to be introduced, based on the new technical and competency qualifications of the QCF and Key Skills qualifications. With such a significant change to manage, the team needed to develop a strategic approach and plan for Key Skills development and delivery within the new Apprenticeship framework.

#### Advice to others

- Bring people along with you at every stage in the development process. At DHA, a whole organisation approach means involving everyone in all changes that take place and on consulting with staff about how to move forward with new initiatives (like the introduction of Key Skills qualifications).
- Staff need to feel confident enough to use their creativity regarding learner support. Of course, they should use up-to-date and effective approaches but they should also be able to develop their own ways forward, based on a general understanding of workplace learning and skills.

### Objectives

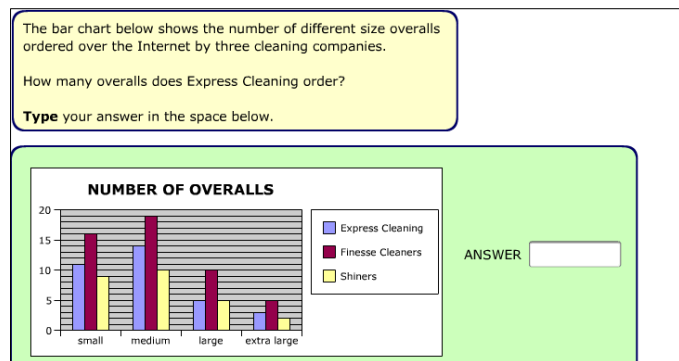
Dawn Hodge, the managing director of the company, felt passionate about the approach she wanted to take to delivering Key Skills. Rather than employ specialist literacy and numeracy staff, she wanted to develop her vocational team's confidence and abilities to deliver key skills within an embedded model. As Dawn explained,

*“One of the main reasons why our learners and employers value us so much is the one-to-one relationships that we build between assessors and learners. I didn't want Key Skills to become an 'add-on', whereby assessors could pass responsibility to another person. I wanted it to be at the heart of all we do and, as such, it's the assessors who need to be able to deliver the support.”*

### Development process

The first step was to review the current LLN assessment process to ensure it enabled the existing level of learners' key skills to be identified, signposting for those with high levels of key skills needs and eligibility for an Apprenticeship to be determined at this stage. Working as a team is a company ethos at DHA, and, as such, the whole team collaborated to identify how to introduce more specific initial assessment tasks for learners. In addition to identifying what LLN level learners operate at, they needed to know the gaps learners have in their LLN knowledge and understanding.

The team reviewed a number of assessment approaches and decided to use the 'Tools Library' assessments (<http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/toolslibrary>) coupled with analysis of learners' writing and interviews with learners to find out how well they feel they can undertake tasks that include LLN (i.e. writing handover reports or working with weights and measures at work). Paper-based as opposed to onscreen versions of the Tools Library were chosen so that assessors would get a feel, when marking the papers, for the type of questions that learners struggled with. Introducing a full diagnostic assessment was not seen as viable, owing to the length of time this takes to administer, and paper-based initial assessments could perform a basic diagnostic role.



To get a good understanding of what it felt like to do the assessments, the full staff team did a literacy and numeracy assessment themselves. This was done in a non-threatening way and, although one or two people were surprised by the questions they got wrong (and right!), the team agreed that this had been a necessary part of their learning journey.

### Staff development

Having carried out an initial assessment, the DHA team identified a number of gaps in their personal LLN skills that they felt needed to be filled before they could support others. Caroline Murphy, senior manager at DHA, made contact with Cheshire West and Chester local authority adult learning team to discuss delivering a 'Move On With Your Learners' (MOWYL) course to staff (see [http://www.move-on.org.uk/mu\\_route.asp?stop=2](http://www.move-on.org.uk/mu_route.asp?stop=2)). This model is based on supporting people to develop their own LLN in the context of supporting others. For example, a MOWYL teacher might support staff to understand different spelling strategies; this helps staff who

sometimes have difficulty spelling words and they can use the approach with their own learners to help them develop spelling strategies of their own.



In addition to arranging personal skills training, Caroline worked with an adviser from Training Plus Merseyside, to plan a series of sessions to help staff develop LLN support techniques.

Two sessions were delivered to the DHA team, on supporting learners' literacy and numeracy development. While the team recognised that this would not equip them

with all the knowledge and skills that a specialist LLN teacher has, it did develop their understanding of how to embed LLN support across everything they do, for example through presenting learners with active learning numeracy tasks during workplace visits. Introducing staff to a range of practical support techniques helped to break down any fears they had about supporting learners. In addition, the team learned about each others' strengths and gaps in knowledge so that they could carry out peer support in the future.

### Challenges and solutions

- **Selling the qualifications to learners.** Assessors were very concerned about how well learners and employers would 'buy in' to the idea of doing Key Skills. To address any barriers they might face in 'selling' these qualifications, they considered the literacy and numeracy involved in carrying out health and social care work; such as weighing service users and following care plans accurately.
- **Reaching workplaces across a wide geographical area.** Delivering Key Skills to learners across a wide geographic area and in the workplace was a priority. DHA learners are front-line staff in care services often working in the community, and delivery had to be tailored to the needs of individual learners and had to be work based. As such, the team needed to be able to offer learners support through their existing assessors. An LLN specialist simply could not be in as many locations as the learners and, therefore adopting a traditional approach (i.e. Key Skills delivery by a Key Skills specialist) would have meant that a lot of learners would have missed out.
- **Making key skills qualifications achievable.** Ensuring learners offered an Apprenticeship had a realistic target for achieving key skills within their programme. This was a major concern for the company as the profile of learners in the care setting indicated high levels of LLN needs. As a team, DHA staff agreed that learners operating one level below the Key Skills qualification they needed to achieve would be accepted on programme. For those needing to progress by two levels assessors would advise on signposting to other providers for specialist support before they could access an Apprenticeship.

## Support for Literacy, Language and Numeracy Programme

### Outcomes

Since January 2011, when DHA started delivering Key Skills for the first time, over 130 learners have been signed up for Apprenticeship programmes that include Key Skills.

The team has developed a new assessment model and portfolio assignment materials as well as a range of learning resources based on active techniques.

In terms of the impact that the Support for LLN Programme has had on the company, Caroline explained:

*“The support offered by this project was excellent. It was timely in terms of our strategic and operational goals and the programme was responsive to our particular needs. The approach enabled the team to take ownership of Key Skills delivery rather than feel overwhelmed by the prospect. Now, we can see where we are going and what we need to do.”*

### Future developments

For DHA, the next step has already begun: to deliver Apprenticeships and support the first groups of learners to develop their Key Skills portfolios and take end tests.

Success rates will be monitored very carefully. Currently, they sit at over 90 per cent for all areas of learning. The aim is to ensure they stay this high for the new Apprenticeship programmes.