



National Research and Development Centre
for adult literacy and numeracy

Summary

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Putting good practice into practice: literacy, numeracy and key skills within apprenticeships An evaluation of the LSDA development project

Synopsis

This is an evaluation report of a development project which explored different models of delivering literacy, numeracy and other key skills within apprenticeships (formally known as Foundation and Advanced Modern Apprenticeships).

This project followed concern about unsatisfactory achievement in literacy, numeracy and other key skills within apprenticeships. Knowledge of existing practice amongst providers indicated that many centres had regarded literacy, numeracy and other key skills as 'a chore' and had been leaving them until late in the programme. Between May and December 2003, the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) led a development project which set out to try out ways of making such skills a higher and more integral priority from the beginning of programmes.

The project trialled a range of models in eight centres, chosen to cover a range of vocational areas and different geographical locations. Literacy, numeracy and other key skills were delivered pre-course, or early in the apprenticeship programme and all addressed activities such as: preparation of the trainers for key skills support; development of initial and diagnostic assessment and individual training plans; development of 'front-end' provision; and preparation of learners for test-based assessment and for their portfolios.

The NRDC evaluation of the LSDA project was carried out through semi-structured interviews, observation of classroom practice and interviews/focus groups with learners. The researchers also collected factual data on each project and quantitative data about each cohort of learners.

This evaluation report describes and analyses the key findings, looking at pedagogy, and its effect on retention and engagement, assessment approaches, the background and training of teachers, and last but not least the responses from learners. The report paints a picture of the issues involved in achieving a practical whole organisation commitment to literacy, numeracy, and other key skills being delivered as a significant and integral part of Modern Apprenticeship programmes.

"This was a textbook example of effective joint working to solve a pressing problem. Diagnosis by the ALI, proposing a way forward, followed up by the DfES, LSDA and keen providers, and authoritatively evaluated by researchers, is a pattern through which the creases in apprenticeships are being progressively ironed out."

**David Sherlock, Chief Inspector of Adult Learning
'Talisman' November 2004**

Key Findings

The evaluation study found that

- ✘ Learners improve their literacy, numeracy and other key skills when the whole organisation believes key skills are an essential underpinning for learning vocational skills and technical knowledge.
- ✘ The 'front-end' delivery model is an effective way of delivering literacy, numeracy and other key skills, as it prepares learners for the skills they need for their apprenticeship programme.
- ✘ The whole staff of the programme – vocational teachers and assessors as well as specialist basic and key skills staff, need to work as a team on literacy and numeracy. This requires planning time, contextualised materials and support and training for vocational teachers.
- ✘ Even learners who had qualifications on entering the programme, such as GCSE's at A*-C in English and maths, benefited from the literacy and numeracy support in completing their apprenticeships.
- ✘ Where employers were actively involved and supported learners' attendance, this had a crucial impact on learners' motivation and engagement and on vocational teachers' commitment to literacy, numeracy and other key skills.
- ✘ Learning experiences have to be enjoyable and engaging and develop learners' self confidence: this needs committed, skilled and experienced teachers.
- ✘ The way in which teachers introduced literacy, numeracy and other key skills was crucial to the attitudes of learners towards them, particularly amongst low achieving youngsters. It is particularly important to constantly promote literacy, numeracy and other key skills to learners as relevant to the workplace and as essential to their vocational training and their future employment.
- ✘ Time needs to be available for individual feedback to learners, formal and informal.
- ✘ Most teachers were under-qualified for the roles they were carrying out
- ✘ In particular vocational teachers were teaching and assessing literacy and numeracy without appropriate training. It is important to develop collaboration between vocational teachers and literacy, numeracy and other key skills specialists within centres as well as providing appropriate staff development opportunities.
- ✘ Funding is needed to resource ILPs; support and

develop the tracking system, and support initiatives such as morale boosting 'bite size' assessments. ILPs on MA's need to be made more accessible and easier to use for learners themselves.

Background and rationale of research

The purpose of the evaluation study was to draw out tentative recommendations for future practice and is addressed to providers, teachers and policy makers. As one of the researchers comments, 'This report provides insight into putting good practice into practice; it is not easy, but this project demonstrates its value for learners.'

Research team

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The full report is available in
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