



Case Study:

Supporting Assessors in Developing Employer Responsiveness

Topic:

Targeting timely completion of learners

Summary:

This case study illustrates how to improve timely completion rates for learners, and to ensure they are able to progress seamlessly to the next stage of their learning.

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Background:

Historically, A+ has a high success rate with learners passing their AAT exams. Pass rates are considerably (in most cases at least 10% above) and consistently (over the last 8 years) higher than the national average. Our tuition is rated highly by learners, employers and outside bodies.

Where we have encountered difficulty is in completing the non-exam elements of the AAT qualification as embedded in Apprenticeships/Advanced Apprenticeships. Learners pass their exams but have outstanding skills tests and non exam-units to complete before being in a position to proceed to the next level. This has a dual negative effect on us:-

1. We have not been sufficiently rigorous in completing the non-exam work and thus our timely completion rate has dropped.

2. We have not been in a position to access the funding stream at the next level and this hampers our cashflow.

Since May 2008, when we were granted a contract for the delivery of Apprenticeships/Advanced Apprenticeships for the over 25s ("25+"), the situation has worsened. We were slow to respond to the fact that this new group of learners would require a substantial increase in our Key Skills provision. Most of our younger Apprentices/Advanced Apprentices were exempt Key Skills on the basis that achievement of eligible concessionary qualifications had been met while in full time education from which many had come straight on to their Apprenticeship programme. While the "25+" category may well have achieved the equivalent GCSE/"O" level passes in English and maths, these would have been deemed too dated. The consequences of this were enormous but having faced the problem we are now in a position to move forward with confidence.

Actions undertaken:

The Development Plan highlighted actions to improve timely completion. These included establishing an assessment team to co-ordinate the process, monitor volumes of work per assessor and then set up a tracking control sheet per learner to identify progress of learners to their target completion date. This process was principally focussed on progress towards the AAT qualification; the Key Skills element of any Apprenticeship type programme was overlooked.

The processes were put in place but during the period January to May, several staff changes forced their own changes. The AAT programme co-ordinator, a key figure in this area, has been on long term sick leave, and her teaching load had to be absorbed by existing colleagues. In April/May, two new experienced accounting assessors were recruited, together with a Key Skills co-ordinator to cover maternity leave. The net effect was that an existing problem of learners not having achieved their target date was going to be exacerbated with the onset of the June exams finishing and learners still not having completed. Based on the tracking control sheet, a Hit List of learners past their expected target date and a Hit List of those coming up to their expected end date was produced. The Hit Lists identified by personal tutor which learners and which units were still required to complete. With approximately 15/16 assessors, it was decided to create teams of tutors, to work in collaboration to help students complete their outstanding work. Four teams were created headed up by one of the directors. Each has given itself a fun name, e.g. "The Cheetahs", "The Dream Team" and team working has proved highly successful. Teams have been meeting weekly to review progress, identify successes and also identify where resource needs to be input. Co-operation across the teams is also high. The team leaders have been able to feed in to ensuring that adequate resource is made available to hasten learner completion. This has included setting up twilight learning classes, visits to the work place to carry out on-site assessment and most importantly, the setting up of Key Skills workshops to meet learner demand. The Hit List showed just how much assessing was still required for Key Skills especially for the "25+" category. The fear was that accounting assessors would be seeing the learner through their NVQ but the Key Skills would get missed. By setting up the Key Skills workshops we are now seeing learners finish ahead of their exam results in August 2009.

There have been other benefits from the Hit List teams being established. Each has had an admin member of staff assigned to help with the chasing of learners for work. This has given a 'whole of

organisation' involvement, everyone is keenly aware of the importance of ensuring learners complete their qualification.

Management information has been crucial. The Operations Director has maintained the Hit Lists on a daily basis; this has been updated and loaded onto Moodle each evening in time for each personal tutor and team leader to review the following morning.

Benefits from actions undertaken:

If we were to provide statistical evidence for the contract year 2008/09, there would be some questions asked as to whether the interventions and actions described above had any effect. The failure to achieve timely completions with learners who were expected to have completed back in February 2008, August 2008 and February 2009 means that these learners while being carried over are never going to impact positively on our timely completion rate. These learners have been successfully managed to a completion over the past six weeks. As for those learners who are expected to achieve this August, we are in a position where they have or will be completed by their expected end date. In effect, we have caught up on those who were behind schedule and have worked to ensure that those not yet at their expected end date are on target to achieve.

Conclusion:

The principal reasons (and main learning points) for improving timely success rates have been:-

- Having up to date accurate information updated daily in terms of progress on a student by student basis
- Setting up of teams. These micro groups have been able to focus in a close collaborative fashion and they have met weekly and fed in where additional intervention is required
- Finally, all staff have been on board with the necessity to have learners complete in a timely fashion. If they don't finish when they are expected to complete then we don't get paid and we're not able to progress them onto the next stage! Employers aren't happy about this either! If we don't deliver they'll find someone else who will deliver.

While the above may be of use for organisations seeking to improve timely completion rate, below are two further actions, ensured that learners completion of Key Skills requirements were met

- Identifying the need to address the delivery of Key Skills for the "25+" category and putting in place additional workshops for this group
- Building up both the assessor and Key Skills staffing resource. The recruitment of two admin staff has also released assessors from some of the non-assessing/teaching activities in which they would otherwise have been engaged.

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