

IN HOUSE DELIVERY OF FUNCTIONAL SKILLS

University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust

1. Why did you choose to bring the delivery of functional skills in house?

There were two reasons for offering Functional Skills (FS) in the Trust. Firstly, we decided in the 1990's when we started delivering the early healthcare NVQs that all learners would undertake Key Skills even though it wasn't then a requirement. When FS replaced the Key Skills, this continued and we were then well placed to include numeracy and literacy when it became a mandatory requirement of the Trailblazer health apprenticeships. Secondly, we were often asked by managers if there was support for staff who were struggling with their numeracy, literacy or ESOL within their roles. As there was a clear need to support effective working practices in the Trust, we set up the current arrangement to offer these subjects as stand-alone courses and qualifications.

To enable these requirements to be met, a way of delivering the FS were considered that would be cost effective and minimise the disruption to services needed, to enable FS to be accessible to all staff in the Trust. Over the past 10 years we have worked closely with a local college who are able to deliver these skills onsite.

2. How did you make the case to senior management?

We made the case about the benefit of staff being more effective and safe in their roles. In addition, we made it clear that it was a mandatory requirement if they were doing the healthcare NVQs/apprenticeships.

3. Can you give us an idea of budget and the areas this broke down into?

The local college is able to pull down funding through their ESFA funding so there is no cost to the Trust. This includes the cost of the trainer to be on site, course materials, registration and certification fees. The Trust provides access to classrooms and where necessary IT training facility. The Trust's Widening Participation Lead acts as the link between the college and the Trust, which is part of their overall role and fully funded by the Trust.

4. What were the main challenges in setting up your in-house delivery and how did you overcome them?

- How would this fit in with the day to day service of the Trust?

Being delivered on-site allows for day to day operational co-ordination promotion of the courses across the Trust and of the application process. The college and Trust link allows for immediate discussion where it is identified a learner may be struggling, and for a plan to be put in place. Allowing managers to decide how they support staff in their own departments, (own time vs within working hours), has ensured there is generally good support from managers and staff.

- What would delivery look like internally? (L1, L2, ESOL, 1:1)?

Working with the college, and following the schemes of work, lesson plans, and guided learning hours set by the college and awarding body, delivery was set to a maximum of 15 students for each course, on a set day.

Both L1 and L2 would be on a rolling programme basis, English followed by maths.

The groups were split to:

L1 09.00 - 12.00 the same day every week for 9 weeks initially (old FS standards)

L2 13.00 – 16.30 the same day every week for 9 weeks initially (old FS standards)

ESOL would be delivered in smaller groups of 5 on a different day for 2 hours, at this time there was no time limit set, and was gauged on the learner's ability and the decision of the tutor.

1:1 sessions were set for those who needed additional support and had learning difficulties. This has meant the completion rates are very good as those needing extra support are able to arrange it directly with the tutor to fit around their work and home life.

- What resources are required by the college staff?

Appropriate room, flip chart and flip chart pens. The room needs to seat the students comfortably. For exams the room needs to be big enough for students to sit as exams conditions dictate, one person per table and a set distance apart.

PC's and internet access (for the initial assessment). Prior to starting any course an initial assessment is completed to determine the students baseline working. They move from the initial assessment to a diagnostic assessment. This then determines any weakness the student may have and allows the tutor to plan the best way for the student to learn.

The diagnostic will also guide the level of FS the student should be placed on. We allow a whole day, however, dependent on the learner's ability some will complete in half a day.

- Exam, invigilator, paper vs online

Exams are completed on the Trust site. The college provides the invigilator. The choice to use a paper examination was preferable for college staff and learners at the time but this has now moved to online exams. We have worked with our Informatics team to make sure the external exam platform is able to be accessed onsite. For inclusion, the college will still offer paper based exams for those who are identified as requiring additional support.

From April 19 – March 20 we had 161 learners

English Level 1	19 Learners completed	2 withdrew
English Level 2	50 Learners completed	3 withdrew
Maths Level 1	25 Learners completed	3 withdrew
Maths Level 2	59 Learners completed	0 withdrew

Those withdrawn, 3 left the trust, 2 felt it was too difficult to proceed at that time, 3 felt the time wasn't right due to personal circumstances and were rolled onto another course when ready.

- Time frame for delivery (especially for those needing to complete both levels of FS, what impact would this have on departments)

Many managers have supported staff to complete the FS within working time. Some have agreed to allow the learners to have part of the sessions in work time with the remaining sessions being completed in their own time.

5. What were/are the main challenges now that the programme is running and how did/do you address them?

On discussion with external experts who support adult learners around numeracy and literacy it was clear that our own team were not best placed to deliver these subjects. It was less around the ability of the team to teach the technical aspects of the subjects and more around not having expertise at engaging and supporting less confident learners who often have anxiety around these subjects to get through the training and the exams. Due to the expanding numbers of learners it was felt it would be more cost effective to use external expert trainers of FS to deliver this training rather than upskill and use our existing training staff. Reform of FS to meet standards has meant that the subject sessions have had to be extended to 12 weeks. This was expected to be a challenge to learner, manager and apprenticeship programmes. However, we found the transition ran smoothly with only a few questions raised.

A big challenge was the expectation that apprentices would need to complete FS in work time and managers were concerned as this meant losing a member of staff for potentially 24 – 48 weeks in addition to their 20% off the job training for their apprenticeship, dependent on FS requirements. To support this and not to put additional pressure on departments and learners, we now expect applicants for most apprenticeship programme to already hold English and maths qualifications at the appropriate level, or to complete FS onsite if they don't already hold these, prior to application.

With higher demand for the training and changes to the FS requirements, delivery has increased from 1 day per week to 2 days per week, alternating English and maths on different days. This has allowed those who had completed one subject to immediately start the next subject without waiting. This has enabled more staff to apply for apprenticeship programmes as they are able to complete their FS quicker before starting their apprenticeship. From our experience we have found it less challenging for apprentices to complete these in advance than trying to study these alongside their programme.

Another challenge we have had is turnover of tutors with skills to deliver all aspects of FS, due to staff movement, promotion/retirement or moving on to pastures new. However, this has been a small number, but has still been challenging for learners who have been working with a specific tutor through L1 and L2 in both subjects, as these are the learners who may have struggled during their compulsory education. New tutors come with different teaching styles and new ideas. Working closely with each tutor has ensured that our staff are supported, and that the tutors have an understanding how staff are released for FS training.

In 2019 maths exams changed again and the complexity of the topics meant there needed to increase the taught content and changes were made to the delivery time from 12 weeks to 15 weeks for both subjects, with a view to changing to 20 weeks for maths, if required. Implementation of these changes to the delivery coincided with Covid-19 pandemic, which halted all face to face training and impacted the exams that were due to be taken. The college worked to overcome and moved all FS training to an online package through Dynamic Learning in March 2020, which appears to be working well with all new students. In April we started 21 new learners on the Dynamic Learning.

Learners that were due to take exams will now be assessed on course work, with results expected 31st July 2020. Learners that need to progress onto the next subject will be set up with the Dynamic Learning system. Currently we have 4 learners that are finding it difficult to engage with the online learning and would benefit from 1:1 support so the tutor is supporting those learners via Zoom.

6. What advice would you give to an employer wishing to set up their own in-house FS learning?

- Develop a partnership with a local training provider
- Be clear about your purpose and strategy for FS in your organisation
- Allocate an internal link person to liaise with the college and to co-ordinate information and application process across your organisation
- Have regular meeting between the Trust link and the college tutor (weekly or fortnightly)
- Regular reporting showing the use of the online learning and progress
- Trust link checking in with the learners on how they are and how they are getting on provides a point of contact for the learners if they are struggling.