



Irene Austin leads an information session with members of the HAFLS family learning team

Taking stock and planning ahead

■ Jackie Short, Professional Development Planning Adviser, East of England

'Family learning is the only area of delivery for us and we do not have other professionals within the organisation to give us this sort of support. We would not have been able to undertake these activities to support staff without the Professional Development Planning (PDP) project,' says Jane Rouse, Senior Adviser Skills for Life and Family Learning at Hertford Adult and Family Learning Service (HAFLS).

HAFLS put a strategic plan for Skills for Life in place in 2007 and in 2008 moved on to implement their whole organisation approach to literacy, language and numeracy. They identified PDP as a particular priority.

Senior management commitment and vision

PDP activity at HAFLS was led by Irene Austin, Senior Development Officer Family Learning along with Jane, who worked closely with Jackie Short, professional development planning adviser for the Skills for Life Improvement Programme in the East of England.

Irene and Jane began with a clear idea of what they wanted from the Improvement Programme

'Professional development planning with the Improvement Programme has helped us take stock of where we are on staff qualifications and plan for the future.'

and a clear vision for the future of the workforce at HAFLS. They were committed to helping their staff move towards the literacy, numeracy and ESOL teaching qualifications they need to carry out their roles confidently and effectively and meet national qualifications requirements.

Both managers already had some knowledge of the new initial teacher training qualifications and continuing professional development requirements. What

they wanted was to be completely up-to-date and informed about how these would apply in the context of family learning, so they could answer queries from staff and plan ahead for the training needs of the service. They also sought clarity and guidance about the qualifications held by the primary school teachers who join family learning teaching teams in the lifelong learning sector.

Success of a shadowing model

Irene and Jane decided to hold a series of awareness sessions for staff, to undertake an audit of teaching staff qualifications and produce a staff development action plan.

As so many staff have short teaching contracts, are geographically widespread throughout the county and would not be paid for attendance at events over and above the usual service meetings, it was not possible to bring them all together for one full team briefing led by the PDP adviser.

It made more sense to hold a series of smaller sessions. Irene shadowed Jackie at the first awareness raising session and became the HAFLS 'Skills for Life PDP champion'. She was then ready to cascade information and advice to staff at subsequent group meetings and training events.

Irene also worked alongside Jackie on the audit of staff qualifications and the charting of each individual's next steps towards fully qualified status. Irene has embraced the new role of Skills for Life PDP champion for HAFLS with energy, enthusiasm and an expert understanding of the family learning context. She is cascading the important messages about qualifications and the new Continuing Professional Development (CPD) requirements at staff training events and in one-to-one meetings with teaching staff out in the field.

Outcomes

As a result of the PDP collaboration:

- HAFLS now has a staff development plan which includes numeracy, literacy and ESOL
- all newly appointed staff are advised on the numeracy, literacy and ESOL training and development they need to support their teaching role.
- HAFLS offers all staff the opportunity to prepare for and take Maths and English national tests at Level 2
- CPD requirements have become an obligatory part of the teaching posts
- mentoring has become part of the job role for experienced teachers and managers
- HAFLS has mounted a Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS) course for its own staff plus staff from partner and sub-contracted voluntary and community organisations working with hard-to-reach adults and families.

Still posing a challenge

The main challenge for HAFLS has been the very part-time, short-term nature of the teaching contracts of many staff and the fact that HAFLS has not traditionally been able to offer payment for attendance at training to these staff. Jane and Irene are still looking at ways to resolve this. Mounting their own PTLLS course, free to staff this year, has been the first really positive solution.

The experience at HAFLS shows how timely, focused input from an

informed external adviser helps providers move more quickly towards their vision.

The family learning workforce

The organisation is a well established adult learning provider which offers family learning and wider family learning both directly and through a wide variety of sub-contracted voluntary and community organisations. Altogether there are 1,236 learners on programmes, with a total of 40 members of staff.

HAFLS employs numeracy, literacy, ESOL and early years tutors, mostly on a part-time, hourly paid basis. They work across a wide geographical area, for lots of different community providers, frequently on short project-based contracts.

Many family learning tutors, particularly in wider family learning programmes, are appointed for a whole range of skills and expertise related to managing developmental play and fun activities like hula-hooping, rather than for their teaching qualifications. Others bring experience of working with young children and their families from a primary school teaching background.

HAFLS is accustomed to experiencing difficulties in recruiting suitably qualified literacy, numeracy and ESOL teachers. They also find it difficult to bring their staff together for continuing professional development and support for their initial teacher training needs.

Q. Are primary school teachers qualified to teach in the lifelong learning sector?

A. Primary school teachers with QTS (qualified teacher status) will have their school teaching qualifications recognised in the lifelong learning sector. They can submit an application for QTLS (qualified teacher learning and skills) using their QTS as part of their application. Guidance has been produced for school teachers (and others) moving into the lifelong learning sector.

'Orientation guidance for qualified teachers moving into the further education sector' was produced by Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) in July 2008.
Ref. FE Orientation Guidance 0508 V1.0