

Skills for Life Improvement Programme



Longden Case Study A flexible numeracy programme

Background

Longden Ltd is a private training service provider established in 1992 and based in Coventry. With a team of 12 assessors/trainers, the company's main focus has been on delivering Level 2 and 3 qualifications for school support staff and on providing management training for a wide range of companies such as banks and government organisations. Longden Ltd pride themselves on offering creative and bespoke training; "We start with a blank sheet of paper and carefully craft a programme of learning to meet your needs and deliver measurable benefits."

Aim

By 2007 Longden Ltd wanted to enhance their courses for school staff by embedding LLN support and offering the national literacy and numeracy qualifications at Level 1 and 2. They wanted to do this in a very flexible way that was as creative as their management team-building course that is delivered through team games outdoors because "in the outdoors the learning sticks because people remember the moment." The aim was to make literacy and numeracy equally as attractive and fun. Because of some personal concerns about learning maths, they decided to focus this project on devising a practical and motivating short numeracy programme for support staff and classroom supervisors in schools.

Method

The first step was to understand the issues round numeracy, particularly people's fear of maths, so several of the staff, including the Managing Director, registered to take the numeracy qualification and experienced what it was like to learn maths today. Having gained the qualification, they then read effective practice research and collated all the sources of free numeracy resources.

Using this knowledge, an innovative blended course was planned that was flexible but affordable, to run through a Train to Gain contract:

- a half day "Count on Us" team challenge
- group workshops (7 x 3 hour weekly sessions)
- short maths self-teaching takeaways (30 x 20 minute daily workouts)
- personal coaching tutorials on a 1:1 basis and test practice

The offer was shaped to meet the needs of school support staff with limited time to attend courses. It also aimed to recruit these key school staff into becoming positive advocates of maths with the children in their schools. They went on to trial the use of mobile learning technology to further develop innovative ways of learning, including, for example, texting all lunchtime supervisors at 11.30 am with reminders to try fun numeracy games that lunchtime.



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The Managing Director knows that changing people's minds about maths will be an on-going challenge and starts with recruitment. Longden Ltd decided to use the opportunity offered by their large yearly certificate presentation ceremony and shaped the whole event to promote maths to their current learners. Over 200 school staff attended from a range of West Midlands schools. Under the banner "Smarties have the answer", group maths games were used as the initial fun part of the proceedings, followed by personal maths skills check activities and guidance on progression, to attempt to break down the support staff's resistance to maths.



The audience had a great time playing maths games in groups and were comfortable doing so, yet when asked to sign up for future courses very few included maths. When questioned, many said they had the literacy qualification already because "we need that for school" but did not know that they also needed a Level 2 maths qualification to progress into teaching. When this was explained to one group and that they could attend a flexible course delivered by the same staff as had taught them their vocational course, resistance was broken down and they all signed up for a maths course.

Outcomes

The company successfully developed a range of strategies to attract learners into numeracy programmes and to deliver the programmes imaginatively and sensitively in a way that has led to significantly increased numbers and to high success rates (an 89% success rate with the first 54 learners to progress through the course).

Learning for other providers

- *Know your target group and tailor the way you flex your model to respond to their needs*
In this case, school staff needed a blended approach, so they could fit studying in with their work demands. They needed some face-to-face tuition outside school times to learn difficult maths concepts and to gain from the experience of group collaborative working. They also needed to be able to practise at home whenever they had a spare moment and, because many had a fear of maths, they needed 1:1 support tutorials.
Longden's blended course meets these learners' needs within their Train to Gain funding.
- *Research effective practice and source a wide range of resources to build into your offer*
Longden's team experienced taking numeracy themselves and researched what was regarded as best maths practice. They sourced existing free quality resources, including interactive learning such as the Move On Hot Topics and modern technologies such as using mobile phones.
- *Look at maximising opportunities to offer numeracy qualifications to your current learners*
Longden tutors are trusted by their learners, who come from diverse ethnic backgrounds. One learner said, "We are overcoming family and cultural taboos, without breaking any cultural or religious rules. Our children are proud of us and our husbands can't believe it."
The Longden staff had a great advantage, therefore, when promoting numeracy to them.
- *Use imaginative yet appropriate ways to recruit learners*
Longden used a range of games to promote "maths can be fun" at a celebration evening. The party feel was established with balloons, food and drink and Smarties were an appropriate practical aid because the audience consisted of primary school support staff.
- *Build in guidance information on how important maths is in the modern workplace*
Longden build in specialist guidance and tailor their skills check to their learners' contexts.