



Foreword

■ Ursula Howard, Director
NRDC Core Team

‘Teacher-educators are using Skills for Life Improvement Programme funds to try new ways of broadening the scope of their own programmes.’

Everyone involved in the Skills for Life Improvement Programme is engaged in a fast-developing context.

Not least, we have the establishment of a new government department with responsibility for the Leitch agenda, the Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS). We can expect more changes as the government moves forward with its response to the Leitch report, and the role of Skills for Life within Train to Gain continues to develop.

NRDC is working together with other national partners in the CfBT-led national consortium to deliver QIA’s Skills for Life Improvement Programme. NRDC’S most important contribution to the Skills for Life Improvement Programme is to lead and support the work on teacher development. But because we have a unique role in research as well as in supporting the development of people – teachers, leaders, managers and others – across whole organisations in the sector, a key role for us is to ensure that the Skills for Life Improvement Programme is research-based.

The Improvement Programme’s activities are informed by research by NRDC and others on ‘what works’. It is more than a one-way process: evidence from the Improvement Programme activities is also helping to inform current research,

advice for policy makers and plans for future activities.

Effective practice starts with the workforce

We know that getting staff qualified is just the beginning. NRDC’s Effective Practice Studies on the teaching of reading, writing, numeracy, ESOL and ICT have helped us to build our knowledge about what enables learners to make progress and become more positive about their learning. Some aspects stand out as vital elements for their achievement. Examples are: teachers’ ability to integrate subject knowledge and pedagogy, the use of differentiation in ESOL, the professional vision of the experienced practitioner, the benefits to learners of working in groups, and learners being convinced that their needs and aspirations are being met. It takes time and a range of approaches to maintain the momentum of professional quality and confidence in pedagogy.

Key themes: research into practice

The Skills for Life Improvement Programme covers a wide range of approaches through its themes of workforce development, whole organisation approach and innovation in teaching and learning. However, programmes will only have value if the end-users, the learners, feel the benefit.

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Evidence from research, much of it in the last five years, is feeding into ways of making this difference.

This is clear in the current programmes that are prioritising, for example, collaborative teaching and management of embedded learning; an increased focus on maths and numeracy; a long-term view of persistence and progression; formative assessment for learning/ planning; and pedagogy that is fit for purpose in different contexts (e.g. vocational sectors, workplace, offender programmes, E2E, ESOL, e-learning).

Practitioners influencing the future

Practitioners themselves will make the ultimate difference. Teacher-educators are using SfLIP funds to try new ways of broadening the scope of their own programmes, to meet the needs of both new and experienced teachers from right across the lifelong learning sectors. Staff from specific sectors are meeting to develop teaching approaches that make best sense in their own contexts. At NRDC, we have had a three-year programme in which practitioners have led research in key areas of Skills for Life. The Practitioner-led Research Initiative explored key priorities such as how to engage new groups of learners – the so-called ‘hard-to-reach’; how to help learners persevere and pursue their goals; and how to enhance creativity in teaching and learning.

In the next phase of SfLIP work, look out for a suite of ‘research summaries’ which aim to help practitioners build their practice on the basis of sound evidence in many relevant areas of work. Please also look out for a range of

‘practitioner guides’ to be published later this year by NRDC in partnership with NIACE. These will cover a range of key areas, including reading, writing, ESOL, ICT, numeracy and embedding.

One major issue which I believe we need to be thinking hardest about over the coming months and years is numeracy. Numeracy and maths remain the greatest challenge of all in Skills for Life – and in the ‘Leitch’ agenda, taking literacy and numeracy forward as priorities to 2020. Between us, we can continue to make a big difference to all aspects of Skills for Life over the next year of the Improvement Programme. Let’s make numeracy central to all our efforts on behalf of learners.

Skills for Life Support 2007–08

QIA is committed to continue to support quality improvement in Skills for Life. Procurement of all support work for 2007–2008 is well on schedule so that details of support activities will be distributed by contractors from August/September 2007.

Register for regular updates

If you wish to be informed of developments on a regular basis please send an email to sflipinfo@cfbt.com with the subject as ‘Register’ and your full name, title, organisation, address, telephone and email address in the body of the email.

Contact us

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