

The Skills for Life Improvement Programme – a need for more Skills for Life teachers

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In its first year, which ended 31 August 2007, the Skills for Life Improvement Programme was more ambitious than its forerunners, the Skills for Life Quality Initiative and the Whole Organisation Approach Pathfinders. Its aims went broader and deeper than any single national programme since the launch of the Basic Skills Strategy at the turn of the millennium.

When the Improvement Programme was launched in autumn 2006, the Leitch report had not yet been published, but it was already clear that England had a considerable skills need, and that Skills for Life learning was fundamental to addressing that need. Good Skills for Life teachers were needed. The Improvement Programme was charged with helping to improve teaching, learning, progression and achievement across all learning settings in the country.

First year successes

The Improvement Programme set up programme development grants for teacher education institutions to offer more innovative courses to help staff to become qualified, and Qualification Support Grants for individuals and their employers to help them meet the cost of training. As a result of these grants, 1,486 additional teaching staff enrolled on courses leading to qualified status.

The table below shows the number who took the subject-specialist courses and the number who took integrated courses, combining a teaching course with the subject specialism. Top-up

courses were also offered to experienced and well-qualified ESOL teachers to give them the opportunity of meeting current qualified status requirements.

Regional spread

Far fewer places were taken up in the central regions of the country, particularly in respect of numeracy teaching. NRDC, the Skills for Life national research centre at the University of London, is investigating whether suitable teacher training places were already available in those regions, whether teacher education institutions were able to access alternative grants, or indeed, as seems probable, a substantial need is still unmet. This year we are prioritising numeracy, offering bigger Programme Development Grants to teacher education institutions for creative routes in numeracy teacher training.

To add to the challenge of achieving a fully qualified Skills for Life workforce, there was, and remains, a shortage of teacher trainers, particularly those who are knowledgeable about a range of learning contexts – for example embedded learning, work-based learning, and offender learning. The Improvement Programme trained over 200 teacher trainers, as well as over 500 experienced staff, to become mentors.

Quality through a Whole Organisation Approach, better teaching and learning

The Improvement Programme supported staff from 1,200 providers in 2006/07. Of these, 850 providers were supported

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	Subject specialism only	Integrated teaching course with subject specialism	Diploma top-up	Total	%
Literacy	425	60	N/a	485	33%
Numeracy	238	58	N/a	296	20%
ESOL	293	272	140	705	47%
Total:				1,486	

to develop good practice and improvement through a whole organisation approach. Others were supported to embed Skills for Life learning in vocational settings, particularly construction, social care and healthcare, or to improve the experiences of learners with learning difficulties or disabilities.

The Improvement Programme grouped providers according to their learning context – for example work-based learning, or offender learning. Although in most cases not starting until January, the group approach proved very successful. Providers of all types and in all learning contexts valued the expertise of the development advisers, their applied approach, and their ability to stimulate learning from their peers. Cooperation proved a powerful spur to mutual learning, as for example, Further Education colleges joined work-based learning cluster groups, learning from practice in the independent sector, as well as willingly sharing their expertise. Providers on the whole made good progress towards meeting their own improvement goals, and achieving their development plans. In a few cases, however, providers

overstretched themselves, by signing up for more improvement groups than they could adequately resource.

Provider staff feedback

- 100% benefited from the opportunity to learn from other providers
- 98% said that working collaboratively has motivated them and supported them to achieve their defined success criteria
- 98% stated they already have or would transfer good practice developed by the group to their own organisations
- 98% found that working collectively has been an effective method to improve Skills for Life delivery.

Continuing professional development (CPD)

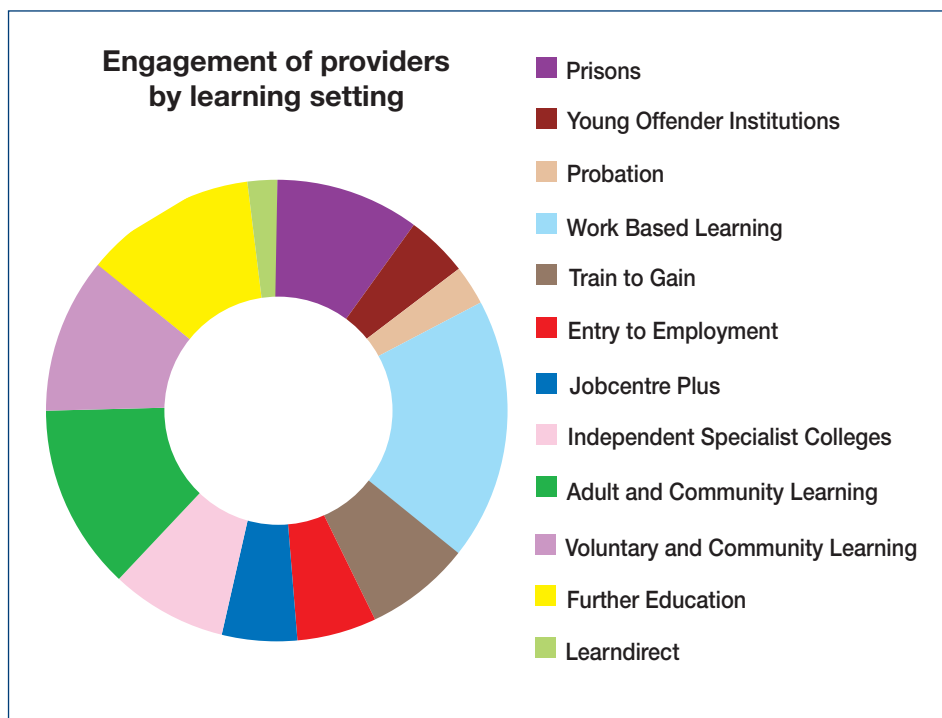
In 2006/07, the Improvement Programme ran a series of one-day professional development events across the country, with feedback from the 3,700 delegates being very positive. This year we are offering CPD in-house, arranging CPD according to needs identified by development advisers.

Progress in 2007/08

Providers are pleased that support from the Improvement Programme has arrived earlier this year than last, and builds on the achievements of the first year.

Measuring the impact of the support from the Improvement Programme is a key priority this year. We are working with specialist evaluators York Consulting to devise a simple but effective way of doing this. We are likely to be asking providers if the Improvement Programme has had a positive impact, for example on teaching and learning, on management, or on achievement and progression and whether these improvements are noted in self-assessment reports.

We are keen to hear your views regarding the type of support you feel is needed. We will continue to liaise with leaders of other national improvement initiatives and will shape the Improvement Programme to respond to particular needs, aligning it with your plans for development and self-improvement.



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