

Functional Skills: DV8 Training Ltd

URN: 51619

Area: London

Date published: 2 March 2012

Reference: 120136

Brief description

This example demonstrates the excellent integration of functional skills with learners' vocational subjects, and a particularly effective approach to overcoming barriers to learning and raising learners' aspirations.

Overview – the provider's message

'When we decided to introduce functional skills, the team were worried by the change, particularly as it meant getting used to working with a whole new set of criteria. Actually, we found that delivering functional skills can be easier than basic skills because they are more relevant and can be contextualised. What has really made the change successful is the close links that have been developed between the vocational lead tutors and the functional skills tutors. Learners see them as part of a team.'



Lauren Ireland, Functional Skills and Quality Support Manager

The good practice in detail

For many providers, the introduction of functional skills can be a real challenge. But for DV8 Training, introducing [functional skills](#), which focus on developing learners' practical skills in English, information and communication technology (ICT) and mathematics, has been a big but successful step. In their recent focused monitoring visit [report](#), inspectors judged that the 'integration and relating of functional skills with vocational subjects are excellent. The approach to overcoming barriers to learning is wide ranging and particularly effective in inspiring learners to set personal challenges and raise their aspirations'. So how does DV8 Training deliver functional skills so effectively as an integral part of learners' programmes? And particularly, how did they overcome the resistance of staff as well as learners, to get to grips with a new qualification?

Alexis Michaelides, the managing director says: 'It's important to make functional skills as relevant as possible and having the lead vocational tutor supporting the delivery of functional



Alexis Michaelides

skills works well. From a standing start our learners' functional skills achievements are above the national rate for ICT and English, and at the national rate for maths.'

The information on the company's [website](#) makes it clear that as well as a passion and talent for creative media, learners also need good functional skills for employment:

'The creative media industries are rapidly evolving. New entrants will need to have an understanding of these industries. Many roles require both technical and creative abilities. Employers look for work-ready individuals who have good literacy and numeracy, strong ICT skills and a good understanding of what it takes to work their way up in creative media – including creativity, the capacity to work hard, work effectively in teams and deliver to deadline.'

Getting the right staff

At the time as planning to introduce functional skills was being undertaken, the company was also recruiting two new basic skills tutors, so they joined the company knowing that delivering functional skills would be part of their job. This made it easier than it might have been if they had been required to change to teaching functional skills at a later stage. And now, all tutors are unanimous in their enthusiasm for functional skills and their relevance for learners, as the skills are practical as well as vocational and highly relevant to employment and employability skills. Richard, the ICT tutor, said, 'I have always wanted to make teaching skills relevant, so functional skills feel like a natural progression from Skills for Life'.

Teaching functional skills

Before starting their programmes, learners undergo thorough screening and diagnostics to assess their mathematics and English skills, and to ensure that they are placed on the right level of functional skills and receive the appropriate individual support. Induction activities and diagnostic tests identify barriers to learning and inform plans to meet individual needs. Functional skills sessions are always double staffed, with the functional skills tutor taking the role of lead tutor and the vocational tutor providing support for the topic and adding contextual relevance. Learners with specific or more generalised learning difficulties benefit from the smaller groups and more specialised support. Lauren Ireland said: 'We make the streaming process holistic to create groups with the right dynamics and also based on how hard we feel learners will work. It's not solely based on diagnostic results as this is not an exact science.'

Functional skills tutors stress the importance of focusing on employability and life skills and making sure that learners keep practising their skills in English and mathematics. Tutors ensure that they cover all the topics in the core curriculum and examinations to support learners' development and achievement. Leonie, the English tutor said: 'We are teaching to empower, life skills, so that learners will cope with what they're going to face in employment and life'.

Learners are not always keen to continue with their English and mathematics skills when they join DV8 Training and the tutors find that they need to be prepared to answer questions about why they have to study functional skills; tutors need to know how to 'sell' the relevance of these skills. Helen, the mathematics tutor said: 'It's important to take as a

starting point something they would actually do, so that they can see when they are going to use it.'

The first session

The first [session](#) that learners attend is critical to ensuring learners' engagement with functional skills. This session is known as the 'buy in'. Its aims are:

- to introduce learners to functional skills
- to create a practical and meaningful context for future functional skills sessions
- to create visual functional skills mind maps which can be referenced throughout the course.



The learning objectives are that by the end of the session the learners will be able to:

- offer a basic definition of functional skills
- list three examples of how they use functional skills in everyday life
- list three examples of how functional skills can be applied to their chosen vocational area

A key feature of this first session is a presentation by an industry professional who relates the value of functional skills to their own professional journey.

The resources used in the functional skills sessions are carefully designed by the tutors to be relevant to, and contextualised for, learners' vocational areas; for example, [business emails](#), [rounding-up numbers](#), and preparing a [promotional leaflet](#).

Lauren Ireland said: 'It's a constant process of trust. If a group isn't totally embracing the approach taken, we look at why and identify how to resolve it. We are constantly adapting and developing our approach to delivering functional skills'.

Functional skills champion



Fusion

The involvement of vocational tutors in developing and delivering functional skills is a particular strength of the provision, demonstrating to learners the fundamental importance of having an appropriate level of competence to be successful in their chosen industry. Alain Chapman, known as Fusion, is the vocational tutor for events management and also the functional skills champion. His wide experience in the media industry makes him one of the organisation's positive role models, who enthuses and motivates learners.

Fusion has been key in the development of functional skills and has helped to devise the '[10 Functional Skills Commandments](#)'. He says, 'Educating young people, and opening opportunities for them is so important. If a learner says "I hate maths, I didn't come here to do maths", we need to make maths relevant to them, get them to re-examine why they need maths; for example, for planning events. At DV8, learners go from switched off to switched on.'

Vocational tutors and functional skills tutors work well together to support the learners. They worked together to write the scheme of work for functional skills and documents and resources for functional skills are shared on the intranet. Vocational tutors provide contextualised ideas for the functional skills sessions, which help to equip learners to apply English, ICT and mathematics in practical situations and to choose the appropriate skills and techniques to solve problems.

What learners say

Learners enjoy their functional skills lessons and the way that the activities are made relevant to their chosen vocational area. Brandon, a first year learner, said: 'I didn't like maths when I was at school but maths is now my favourite subject. It is more meaningful here and helps with things like marketing and budgets.' They can identify how their skills are improving and how the chances of being successful in the music, events or fashion industries are increasing. They particularly like the opportunities to learn through enjoyable activities, such as quizzes and competitions. For example, Challis, a first year learner, enjoyed the task of choosing a word from the dictionary and explaining it to the rest of the group, and [exercises to improve memory](#).



The use of real events such as the 'Festival of Talent' from an early stage in the programmes encourages learners to use and develop a wide range of valuable skills, such as using ICT to prepare posters, leaflets and press releases. Learners also develop their organisational and teamworking skills through their involvement in these events.

Provider background

[DV8 Training](#) runs work-based learning programmes in music, media, fashion and events management across London and the South East and is based in the Walthamstow area of London.



Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

To view other good practice examples, go to:
www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/goodpractice