

Case Study: Enabling all learners' views to be heard

'Assessment and learning: involving the learner'. LSC funded project.

The context:

Newcastle City Council Skills for Life (literacy and numeracy) Service is a well established organisation which works with learners from across the city and beyond who wish to improve their literacy and/or numeracy skills.

We work with approximately 800 learners per year from Pre-Entry to Level 2. We are one of the very few providers locally who still work with Entry and Pre-Entry learners.

Traditionally we have always worked with people with Learning Disabilities, mostly in one discrete class, with those having higher level skills working in mainstream classes. The provision for LLDD (literacy and numeracy) has shrunk in the city so we have increased demand to work with these learners and we now have five LDD classes per week – a 60% rise on last year.

The challenge:

As part of Newcastle City Learning we have to follow set procedures and practices. The mainstream generic interim and end of course evaluations have to be completed by our learners even though they are complex, irrelevant to many of our learners and the language is inaccessible to many with literacy difficulties.

This year a new on-line survey has been introduced. The format and language has been simplified and for those with basic skills needs the form is much more user friendly. However, it is still not easily accessible and the questions are not relevant to most of our LDD learners.

In some of our learning environments the students have no access to IT. The learners were asked to complete the questionnaire on paper, which was subsequently uploaded by administrative staff.

Our challenge is to adapt the on-line form so that it can be accessed and completed by learners with LDD so that their voice can be heard.

There are other issues that also need addressing

- Will the city allow us to alter the format?
- Will they accept paper as well as on-line responses?
- Can the revised version responses be assimilated into the mainstream results, thus allowing LLDD voices to be heard within the NCL community?
- Should LLDD views be recorded and considered separately?

What we did:

- Revised language of form and took out irrelevant questions.
- Changed form to make it more user friendly, using icons
- Checked with line manager that new format was acceptable
- Trialled the paper version with a group of learners

The outcomes:

Some of the questions were too open ended and some too ambiguous so that learners didn't know what they were being asked.


The process of completing the form was tutor intensive and, with a large mixed ability group took about 40 minutes of a two hour session. The NCL on-line version is designed to only take a few minutes of a learner's time.

After the trial, and discussion with group, the first draft of the form was amended.

The impact:

Looking at the surveys has made the LLDD learning team focus on the question of full participation within the service for these learners. We feel that even with the adaptations that this type of questionnaire does not give them the full opportunity to reflect and express their opinions about their learning.

We feel that we have been partially successful, in that there is some recording of LLDD voices and opinions, but we recognise that by trying to make 'one size fit all' we are not really hearing their voice. Although we will continue to try to adapt the format this exercise has made us focus on the need to include the LLDD learners within a regular Skills for Life Learner Forum.

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