

Case Study: Involving trainees in the self assessment of soft skills

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

**The context:**

Finchale Training College is a national specialist provider of vocational rehabilitation for unemployed disabled adults with multiple and complex barriers to employment.

The College adopts a holistic approach to each trainee, with the aim of overcoming barriers and building on strengths.

The age of our learners starts at 18 with some in their 60s, the average age being 37. Similarly trainees will have had varied life experiences. Some will have worked as managers, construction workers, civil servants, prison officers or members of the Armed Forces whilst others will not have worked previously. Some learners will not have any formal qualifications whilst others will have achieved university degrees. Everyone is different and the College recognises and builds on those differences. What all our learners have in common is a need to overcome the barriers that have prevented them from finding work and the desire to do so.

The challenge:

We wanted to create a method of monitoring and supporting the individual's personal soft skills – as identified by employers as vital to gain and sustain employment. We also wanted to ensure that the individual would be able to take responsibility for the improvement of these skills and be able to record the journey.

What we did:

- On Initial Assessment, completed a few weeks before attending College, trainees are each given a short questionnaire about how they rate their soft skills. The results are then discussed with the interviewer as a means of finding out more about the individual.
- We decided to use this questionnaire again, when the trainees had settled into their programmes, at the end of their third week in College, to note any differences.
- Recording the information on the College's VLE (Virtual Learning Environment) enabled the trainee to focus on one question at a time. We were also then able to compare the two sets of data and note any positive and negative changes since attending College.
- This information was then discussed with the individuals and they were able to set short targets for themselves. They could also use the system to ask any further questions and record any relevant information.
- They were also able to record how they felt about the questionnaire and this has led us to re-evaluate the actual questions and how many possible choices to provide as five answers always allowed for 'sitting on the fence'. We will try again with six.

The outcomes:

- The trainees have been able to map out their progress and the changes in their attitudes since attending College, and they can see the differences, explain why and, more importantly, be able to control what they can do next.
- The College management has found the initial findings helpful in that they can see which elements of the induction process have been successful and where changes, if necessary, can be made.
- A more appropriate questionnaire has been devised which will be trialled by the current group. This uses more 'user-friendly' language.
- We will have six options for the questionnaire so as to have no middle answer.

The impact:

- The individuals can take control of personal targets.
- The trainees now have instant access to support via the VLE system and this can record their progress with their soft skills.
- The questionnaire helped to raise important employability issues, for example, why is presentation or hygiene important in the workplace?
- Being more aware of what employers require in the workplace can change an individual's personal goals.

Recommendations:

- The College management can look into the possibilities of rolling the system out to the rest of the College.
- The instructional staff will need to be involved as they will be able to support the soft skills in the training areas.
- The VLE system allows for different statistics which can then be used to collate any successes or problems encountered by the trainees. The employment department can use this information when planning soft skills sessions.
- Further information about soft skills can be found on the internet / other sources which can then be used to support both learners and staff.

Supporting documentation:

For any examples of this system, questionnaire or any other information please contact the College:

 The logo for Finchale Training College features a stylized green bird with its wings spread, perched above a red and orange flame-like shape. To the right of this graphic, the words "finchale" and "training college" are written in a green, lowercase, sans-serif font, stacked vertically.	For further information contact: Richard Froud / Vocational Instructor richard.froud@finchalecollege.co.uk Liz Smith / Functional Skills Tutor liz.smith@finchalecollege.co.uk Finchale Training College Tel: 0191 386 2634
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