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MEASURING THE IMPACT OF BASIC SKILLS IN THE WORKPLACE

Pioneering research by the Workplace Basic Skills Network at Lancaster University into how learners, employers and providers view basic skills courses is set to transform the way workplace learning is conducted.

The Network is currently engaged in finalising the wording of three detailed questionnaires – one each for learners, employers and providers – in order to evaluate the benefits of training given.

The project has a two-fold aim. The first is to produce quality reviews after a course has been completed for each stakeholder involved in the project. And the second is to establish a database of case studies on which professionals in the field can draw on.

“This has the potential to transform the way basic skills courses are delivered in the workplace,” says Bronwyn Leonard, who is heading the research. “The problem with evaluating the impact of basic skills training at the moment is that much of it is anecdotal. We want to provide a tool that helps participants - whether they be learners, employers or providers – analyse the benefits of the training. And at the same time we want to set up a database of case studies that can be easily accessed by our members.”

Despite the quest for a more formal way of measuring the benefits of basic skills training, Ms Leonard points out that “one size does not fit all”. Every project is unique and a special approach is always required. There were, however, constants in workplace training that any project would do well to take into account.

The Network also aims to produce a booklet in which the case studies are tabulated, and these can act as a marketing tool for the Network’s own extensive range of professional development courses.

Each of the three questionnaires will be treated in a slightly different way: the form for learners will be completed in conjunction with the tutor; the form for

employers will be filled in by providers after interviewing the employer; and providers will complete their own.

“We also hope the information gleaned will enable us to detect common responses from certain kinds of learner and employer,” said Ms Leonard. “A well-established larger company, for example, may well be more disposed towards releasing staff for training within company time, whereas a small firm may be reluctant. This has repercussions for providers in the way they make initial approaches.”

The collection of quality case studies is the latest contribution to a series of research projects conducted by the Network into a wide range of basic skills issues. It confirms the Network’s position as a leader in the continuing drive towards professionalising the field of basic skills.

Note to editors:

The Workplace Basic Skills Network, based at Lancaster University, is a national membership organisation dedicated to workplace language, literacy and numeracy provision. Founded in 1993, it supports “Skills for Life”, the government’s adult literacy and numeracy strategy. The Network builds professional capacity in workplace basic skills through sharing and dissemination of good practice and continuing professional development, supporting basic skills professionals to meet the language, literacy and numeracy needs of today’s changing workplace. Address: Workplace Basic Skills Network, CSET, Lancaster University, Lancaster LA1 4YL; tel: 01524 593405; website: www.lancaster.ac.uk/wbsnet

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