

Aylesbury Training Group

An interview with Lynne Saint, by David Mathew of the Workplace Basic Skills Network

Situated an easy fifteen-minute walk from Aylesbury train and bus stations, the Aylesbury Training Group's premises form part of an industrial estate that also houses a large Siemens building. The ATG building (one of a row of identical units) is certainly not large, but a great deal of work goes on inside. On the day of my visit, the main reception area is a hive of business being done and of mandatory day-to-day problem shooting. A tray of drinks had been spilled and a teacher had been delayed on her way in because of the bad weather. Working on the principle that one can tell a good deal about an organisation from how it handles unforeseen events, I can add that it was impressive to watch the grace under pressure with what the problems were solved. Before long I was able to speak to Lynne Saint, who manages the operation (problems and all) once matters had settled. I got the impression of a very professional unit.

ATG has recently embarked on a Skills for Life programme of learning. 'Yes, Literacy and Numeracy are fairly new ventures for us,' Lynne told me. 'And I'd be lying if I said that the programme was completely straightforward to set up. We were talking about these classes at the end of 2004, but it took a long time – and a lot of talking – to get to the point where we were happy and confident to get going.'

Thursday is now Skills for Life Day: 'two hours of Literacy and two hours of Numeracy per week... The learners are often on Engineering apprenticeships, and come to class with skills at around Entry Levels 2 or 3,' Lynne said. 'The need for learning is identified via Engineering Volunteering, and the learner is assessed by an NVQ assessor and signed up as an apprentice.' As far as levels are concerned, at ATG there is often an element of flexibility, and a learner with a different level can attend with suitable support. Class sizes are approximately six learners per class, and they work with contextualized learning materials, which are also stimulating – communications games, for example.

The tutor for both subjects is Chris Watts. 'It was also Chris who worked hard to develop the materials,' Lynne continued (the materials are very professionally produced; this obviously comes at quite a cost for the centre) 'and it is also Chris who reviews the Individual Learning Plan for each learner every week.' The programme that the learners were following for their course when I visited had nine sections. In common with many programmes, there was an Initial Assessment; a section for Literacy (schemes of work, ILPs, work records, review records); and then a similar section for the Numeracy. There were also completed tasks for both subjects, practice test papers, reviews of

learning styles and diagnostic assessments. It was one of the most thorough portfolios of work that I have seen, and an excellent achievement for a thirty-hour programme. Furthermore, time is given in each session for both learner *and* tutor reflection.

This is ATG's pilot Skills for Life project. Almost by definition, perhaps, a pilot scheme will face its challenges. It would be fair to say that Chris, in the classroom, was dealing with learners, some of whom had very definite ideas as to what they wished and wished not to work on. Nor were these same learners shy to voice their opinions about what they liked and didn't like about the previous session. Chris handled the criticisms (and the praise) with professional good humour; writing seemed to have come in for some bad press, as far as that particular class was concerned. Either Lynne and Chris will tweak the programme slightly, or attempt to sway the learners' opinions by the end of it. I will be interested to see how the good promise of this project continues.

For further details, please contact: Aylesbury Training Group, Head Office, Gatehouse Close, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, HP19 8DN. The phone number is 01296 481818. The fax is 01296 437391. More details about the broader range of ATG's provision (outside Literacy and Numeracy) can be found on their website: <http://www.atg-training.co.uk/l1.htm>.