

## **Milton Keynes College - Supporting Agency Workers in the Workplace:** A Case Study by Jane Rouse and Liz Mitchell of Milton Keynes College and David Mathew of The Network.

Last summer Milton Keynes College was approached by Culina Logistics who wanted to support the development of language skills for agency staff employed by the company. Culina Logistics had employed a number of Polish/Lithuanians workers as pickers in the warehouse and they now wanted to offer them full-time permanent posts. Most of the agency workers, however, did not have sufficient language skills to cope with their induction training which included dealing with a medical, health and safety awareness issues, undergoing an interview, dealing with numeracy and a spatial awareness test, understanding instructions and procedures in the workplace and talking about their work experiences. In response to the request Milton Keynes College designed a 30 hour course delivered to fit in with the workers shift patterns which included early mornings, evening and mid morning classes. The pattern of the classes meant that we had to use a team of 3 tutors to cover all the classes. The course was fully supported by Culina who encouraged staff to attend, organised accommodation, resources and schedules for classes. Our link person, Tony Reardon, provided the tutors with support and authentic company materials to help with the planning and teaching. He also took an active interest in the course, seeking ongoing feedback from the tutors.

The course was designed to be as practical as possible and meet the needs of the learners within a specific situation. We used the company's literature, accident report forms, health and safety rules and procedures. We even used their canteen and other facilities to develop language skills. The learners took the tutors on a tour of the workplace, giving directions and pointing out places. This was great practice and a practical lesson in how to abide by the very safety practices with which the learners were gaining familiarity. We wanted to accredit the learning but needed a form of accreditation that was flexible enough to allow us to embed the language development within a specific workplace and respond to the individual needs of the learners. We used OCN ESOL units that were assessed by building a portfolio of evidence, which reflected the development of language skills in the workplace.

Twelve learners enrolled on the courses. All underwent initially assessment, which placed them at Entry level One. Retention was good with only one learner leaving to find other work. Of the 11 who completed the course all achieved at least one OCN unit though the majority achieved three or four units. About half the learners were taken on as full-time permanent employees by the end of the course. The success of this project was the result of good communication and planning, a willingness of all the parties to be flexible in meeting the

needs of the learners and the enthusiasm and commitment to complete the project. Designing and planning the course has proved to be a valuable experience which we will build upon to deliver further planned courses both at Culina and other employers who have subsequently contacted Milton Keynes College.