

Oxfordshire Skills for Health briefing paper

Oxfordshire Skills for Health (OSfH) is a workplace learning programme aimed at low-paid staff in a range of Oxfordshire NHS organisations. It is managed and delivered by Oxfordshire County Council and funded by the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA). The programme is widely recognised as an example of innovation and good practice (e.g. it has been written up in NHS Magazine, referenced in the DfES's revised *Skills for Life* Employer Toolkit, identified in research by the Institute of Employment Studies and also in the recent LSC-funded Unison *Promoting Skills for Life in Health and Social Care Scoping Report*). It is currently participating as a research site in the NHSU / NRDC Maths4Life programme.

While catering to the needs of individual learners, the programme is committed to learning that impacts the workplace as a whole. Its prime focus is the development of practical methodologies to make the learning culture espoused by the NHS a reality for low-paid workers.

At the heart of *Oxfordshire Skills for Health* is its work at one of the country's largest acute trusts, Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals (ORH). ORH is a teaching trust, spread over four sites and employing about 10,000 staff. *Oxfordshire Skills for Health's* work at the Trust is known as the *ORH-Stepping Stones* programme.

Programme origin

ORH-Stepping Stones was initiated in March 2001 by ORH's Head of Facilities, together with the Head of Learning and Development. The programme's initial brief was to add value to the Facilities employment offer and simultaneously to address communication issues associated with workforce diversity by offering staff free literacy, English language, numeracy and IT learning in paid work time.

Programme scope

To date *ORH-Stepping Stones* has delivered some 12,000 hours of learning to over 500 ORH staff. While the programme continues to prioritise Facilities staff groups (in-house and contracted out), it has supported a range of other staff groups, including

- Admin & Clerical
- Clinical Coders
- Estates
- Finance and Procurement
- Lab technicians
- Learning and Development
- Nursing
- Health Care Assistants
- Human Resources
- X Ray technicians

and League of Friends volunteers.

Current activities include team appraisal, health and safety training, risk assessment, NVQ assessment, KSF, AfC and IWL support and facilitation as well as learning and development for individuals (managers as well as staff) in communications (including English language, job-related literacy and IT) and maths-related skills (including nursing calculations).

Delivery team

A team of a dozen (equivalent to eight full-time posts) is employed by Oxfordshire County Council to deliver these activities. The team combines expertise in adult learning (especially adults of low educational attainment and / or limited English) with expertise in people management and workplace systems and processes (such as health and safety). The team operates without a physical base.

Programme context

1. *The need to become a customer-focused organisation*

The wider context for *ORH-Stepping Stones* is NHS modernisation: more staff, working differently; in particular, the demand for new skills among support and ancillary staff.

A recent edition of ORH News included the following

How does the ORH become a customer focused organisation, in the new world of patient choice? This was the challenge discussed by Trevor Campbell Davis, during his most recent round of open sessions for staff. He stressed the need for the ORH to think about the whole patient experience, not just the quality of clinical care. When patients are given a choice, cleanliness, the food, the general environment and the courtesy of staff are all going to be important too. How we tackle these issues will influence how well we do in the future. Given the financial restrictions within which we have to work, some difficult and unfamiliar choices may have to be made as we move into a much more competitive marketplace.

From *ORH News*, March 2005

The relationship between learning (successful adaptation to change) and performance is clear. The importance to organisational success of sections of the workforce traditionally excluded from learning is also clear.

2. *The (basic) skills issue*

SEEDA funding for *ORH-Stepping Stones* has been predicated on the very low level of basic skills (i.e. literacy and numeracy) within the UK workforce. Recent research suggests that, in line with the rest of the UK adult population, half of NHS professional and managerial staff and over two-thirds of other NHS staff perform below GCSE level when their literacy skills are tested. Almost two-thirds of NHS professional and managerial staff and nearly nine out of ten of other NHS staff perform below GCSE level when their maths skills are tested. NHS reliance on non-English speaking overseas staff adds a further dimension to the skills issue. Limited information processing skills coupled with limited communication skills pose a significant obstacle to organisational performance, let alone modernisation¹.

3. *The KSF*

The introduction of the NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework, linking learning to pay progression, is an attempt to place learning at the heart of service development. It seeks to raise demand for

¹ E.g. new skill mixes requiring more from support and ancillary staff; EPR and the expanding use of IT (NPfIT)

learning while obliging organisations to meet that demand. It is worth noting that these demands will have to be met without any extra resources.

4. PFI

Management of Facilities staff is about to be contracted out to Carillion; historically, contracting services out has complicated customer-service issues at ORH.

Programme focus

ORH-Stepping Stones is currently focused on two questions

1. *What support is most useful to help staff do their jobs effectively?*
2. *How can learning opportunities for staff be maximised and optimised?*

To help answer the first question, the programme has considered the link between human resource management and organisational performance. Recent research² into this relationship identifies 11 key HRM areas. Those areas are

- involvement
- communication
- teamwork
- job challenge / job autonomy
- work-life balance
- pay satisfaction
- job security
- performance appraisal
- training and development
- career opportunity
- recruitment and selection

Organisational behaviour in these areas affects organisational outcomes.

Characteristically, implementation of policy in these areas is devolved to operational line managers. How effectively they carry through that implementation determines many of their performance outcomes. Consequently, responding to requests for support from Facilities and other departments in these areas has become a priority for *ORH-Stepping Stones*.

In seeking to address the second question, the programme has moved consistently towards identifying the learning opportunities presented by work activities themselves. The programme is currently involved in the development of on-the-job learning programmes that support performance management and teamwork while offering individuals skills development opportunities in work-related literacy, English language, maths and IT.

² Purcell, J., Kinnie, N., Hutchinson, S., Rayton, B., and Swart, J. (2003) *Understanding the People and Performance Link: Unlocking the Black Box* London CIPD

Programme activities

For teams and departments

- **Management and Leadership**
 - Management development programmes
 - Coaching and mentoring for managers and supervisory staff
 - Training for supervisors to deliver training
- **Health and Safety**
 - Risk assessment, written safe systems development (for managers)
 - CIEH Foundation Certificate in Health and Safety
 - CIEH Foundation Certificate in Food Hygiene
 - Infection Control training
 - Manual handling
- **HRD / OD**
 - Team appraisal development and implementation
 - Agenda for Change facilitation
 - KSF facilitation
 - IWL focus group facilitation
 - Skills escalator / lifelong learning strategy development
 - Role development (senior ward housekeepers identified *Stepping Stones* support as the most useful input they received at ORH)
 - Facilities *Fast track Recruitment & Selection Pilot*
 - Plain English review (i.e. checking Trust documentation to ensure readability)
 - Departmental communications audit

For individuals

- **Management and Leadership**
 - ILM Certificate in Supervisory Management
 - Coaching and mentoring for managers and supervisory staff
 - Training for supervisors to deliver training
- **NVQ assessment**
 - NVQ 2 Support Services in Healthcare (domestics, porters)
 - NVQ 2 Team Leading (catering staff, domestics, porters)
 - NVQ 3 Customer care (senior ward housekeepers)
 - learning support / facilitation for NVQ candidates
- **Communications (including IT)**
 - Literacy development (from basic literacy to higher level report writing for managers)
 - Dyslexia support (note that dyslexia now falls within disability legislation)
 - English language training (including the innovative on-the-job 'BiteSized' system)
 - IELTS preparation
 - IT training (from basic introductory courses to coaching for managers in the use of e.g. spreadsheets and databases)
- **Maths**
 - Basic numeracy
 - Finance and budgeting for managers
 - Nursing calculations
- **Learning support**
 - Support for individuals engaged in a wide range of other workplace learning programmes