

## **CASE STUDY: Skills for Life at Serco**

**Interview with Christina Mitchell, Project Manager, 'Skills for You,' Serco, Hook, Hampshire.**

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Serco is an international service company offering governments, agencies and companies operational management and consulting expertise in the aerospace, defence, education, health, home affairs, local government, science, technology, transport and commercial sectors. It has 40,000 employees world wide and 30,000 in the UK.

In 2005, Serco was awarded the Rentokil Initial Skills for Life Award as part of Business in the Community's Awards for Excellence. This reflected the success of its Skills for Life provision.

To assess the impact of Skills for Life provision, pilot projects took place initially on a number of Serco sites. The outcomes clearly demonstrated how essential skills development can be integrated into learning in the workplace and can benefit the business and the individual.

The programme was developed in partnership with trade unions, government and training providers, and aims to improve literacy, numeracy and language skills by providing workplace development opportunities for all staff. The Skills for Life programme was named 'Skills for You' and is firmly linked to one of the company's four governing principles:

### **'Enable our people to excel'**

Serco appointed a 'Skills for You' project leader, Christina Mitchell, who reports to the Head of People Development; her role is to work nationally across identified Serco sites to engage as many employees as possible and encourage them to take up the Skills for Life learning opportunities offered through work. She will travel to new sites and work with managers to explain the programme by giving a presentation and showing examples of the 'Skills for You' programme's success on other sites. A DVD has been made to capture the positive outcomes of the training; this shows interviews with learners who have derived enormous benefit from taking part.

Skills for Life initial assessments are carried out with employees and then local providers are selected and engaged to set up sessions to fit the shift patterns and work needs of the employees. Christina works with the providers to tailor their provision to the needs of the particular Serco site and also manages the contracts with the providers. All providers have been found to be good at contextualising the learning materials to the workplace.

The company gives time off during working hours to enable employees to take part in Skills for Life training, sometimes two hours per week is allowed, or half the session time is allowed in work time, half in the employees' own time.

An example of successful provision is that of Portsmouth College which has been working with the RN ship to shore services. The college runs a drop-in centre on a Friday where employees can attend either before or after a shift.

All the programmes are monitored and evaluated through surveys conducted with contract managers and learners. Learner satisfaction often leads to advocacy, as positive experiences are shared with colleagues, who then come forward to take up the learning.

The project is very highly regarded and has a high profile with the DfES as a model of excellence.

The sectors covered by the project at present include: health, the RN Defence and Aerospace, marine service contracts servicing RN ships, RAF contracts, refuse contracts, prisons, transport services, and the British Aerospace airbus.

As at February 2007, 2,832 employees have been assessed through the 'Skills for You' programme and 470 employees have achieved qualifications or are in training.

Following the programme, increasing numbers of employees are applying for supervisory roles or promotion because of increased confidence, motivation and improved essential skills. Investment by the company and the appointment of dedicated staff for the 'Skills for You' programme indicate that it is set continue.

It is a model of Skills for Life in the workplace to be recommended for other companies.