



## **Test the Organisation Ashfield District Council Case Study**

### **Background**

For many years, identification and support for employees with respect to developing numeracy and literacy skills has been taken on an individual basis. Typically needs have been identified under the following circumstances:

- Capability Procedures
- Redeployment situations
- Redundancy situations

On occasion employees have personally sought to develop skills during initiatives such as Adult Learners Week or through discussion with their line manager or other representatives.

Mechanisms such as Performance Development Review Appraisals (introduced in yr.2000) and Skills Audits have provided a formal organisational opportunity to identify needs with respect to numeracy and literacy.

A link to the Move On Learner Route providing online skills development and practice tests has been available to employees via Ashfield District Council's intranet Employee Learning and Development Site.

### **Context**

In 2009 the trade unions representing employees of Ashfield District Council, UNISON and GMB recruited two new Union Learning Representatives (ULRs)

In December 2009 the Performance Development Review Appraisal procedure went through a periodic review, was lengthened, and required deeper understanding and response to the content. It was agreed that if required employees would be supported to develop literacy skills in order to increase their participation in the process.

The recruitment of the new ULRs and desire to publicise their role, the revised Performance Development Review Appraisal documentation and the impending 2010 international Adult Learners Week provided the catalyst for holding an event that embraced the opportunity to Test the Organisation.

The event aims were to:

- Develop partnership workplace learning with the Union Learning Representatives
- To promote the role of the Union Learning Representatives
- For employees to have an opportunity to identify areas for improvement with respect to numeracy and literacy
- For Ashfield District Council to identify employees and provide support as necessary with respect to numeracy and literacy skills
- For learning in general to be promoted

## The Event

A core-working group comprising the following representatives initially planned, coordinated and undertook agreed activity:

- GMB Union Learning Representative
- HR & Payroll Manager
- Training Manager
- UNISON Union Learning Representative

The core-working group was supported in preparation and in delivery of the event by:

- Nottinghamshire Public Sector Compact, who provided links to Unionlearn
- Unionlearn with the Midlands TUC, who provided advice and guidance and administered Test the Organisation during the event
- NIACE (The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education), who supplied generic lifelong learning materials
- The Dyslexia Association, who provided a range of pamphlets and publicity materials
- Officers of Ashfield District Council's Communications Section, who provided event publicity
- Ashfield Partnership Manager, who provided the connection to Ashfield Links Forum
- Officers of Ashfield District Council's Asset Management Section who provided catering and operative support
- Officers of Ashfield District Council's IT Section, who arranged IT support for operation of the numeracy and literacy mini tests
- West Nottinghamshire College, who supervised an information stand and also administered the numeracy and literacy tests
- Ashfield Links Forum, who supervised an information stand

A decision was made to title the event 'Ask Andy'. This was done to arouse curiosity and it provided particular publicity for the new GMB URL, Andy Burgin. The event was held over two days on Tuesday 18th May 11.00 - 3.00 pm Northern Depot, Sutton-in-Ashfield and Friday 21st May 11.00 am 3.00pm - Main Council Offices, Kirkby-in-Ashfield.

The event was publicised throughout the authority using posters, on the council's intranet front page and on plasma screens located in employee restaurants.

Two Nintendo DS game systems were purchased as prizes as an incentive to attend the event. Nintendo DS was selected as it was agreed that using the games is in itself an interactive learning experience that is also fun to use

Upon attending, every visitor was automatically entered into a prize draw to win one of the two Nintendo DS systems. At the same time, each visitor was also invited to indicate if they would like further information on:

- Training
- Help with numeracy skills
- Help with literacy skills
- Being a Union Representative

Each of the days were vibrant and fun comprising a range of stands and displays that were enthusiastically managed and provided for visitors a wealth of varied

lifelong learning information; including workplace related learning plus miscellaneous short courses and support available from different partners and groups within the locality. West Nottinghamshire College furnished individuals with programme information through to degree level courses. In addition to information stands, visitors could take up the challenge of competing with colleagues using a Nintendo DS system (not one of the prize draw models!) – this was a popular and lively activity. Also available to visitors was an array of light refreshments and a variety of cakes. While attending the event visitors were invited to take part in the numeracy and literacy mini tests that were administered in a private room separate to the stands. For those people who did not wish to do the mini tests during the event, paper copies were available to take away and complete. A number of employees chose to do this with their colleagues. Having completed the paper test, one person later returned to the event to discuss their particular needs.

Finally, at the end of each day the Head of Neighbourhood Services and the Deputy Chief Executive Officer respectively made the prize draw.

### Post Event

A meeting has been arranged to analyse and meet all learning requirements.

### Evaluation

There are two potential strands of evaluation related to the event these being:

1. Evaluation of the Working Group and pre & post event action
2. Evaluation of learning and it's impact on individuals and the organisation

The following summary is based on initial observations and anecdotal evidence.

	<i>Evaluation of the Working Group and pre &amp; post event action</i>		<i>Evaluation of learning and it's impact on individuals and the organisation</i>	
	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Areas for improvement</b>	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Areas for improvement</b>
<b>Level 1 Reaction</b>	<p>All aims for the event were realised</p> <p>Mix of people – variety of different qualities and skills brought benefits to achievement of event</p> <p>All stands, activities and facilities received positive comments by visitors</p>	<p>Develop further specific objectives</p> <p>Increase amount of preparation time</p> <p>Increase number of stands and contributors</p>	<p>25% of Ashfield District Council's workforce attended the events.</p> <p>Approaching 50% of those who attended took part in the mini tests administered through Unionlearn.</p>	<p>Increase attendance and participation in tests</p>
<b>Level 2 Effectiveness of the learning</b>	<p>Data available to analyse learning needs of participants</p>	<p>TNA to be developed to be more specific</p>	<p>Some participants expressed intentions to take action following attendance at the event. Intentions included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing personal teaching skills</li> <li>• Undertake further education</li> <li>• Explore matters relating to Dyslexia</li> </ul>	

<p><b>Level 3 Impact of the learning on performance</b></p>	<p>Provided a learning experience related to understanding each other and delivery of event</p>		<p>Completion of follow up Level 2 qualifications likely to increase effectiveness, career prospects etc</p>	
<p><b>Level 4 Organisational Impact</b></p>	<p>Two additional URLs recruited during the events</p>	<p>Improve TNA info. to capture more detailed visitor details. For example Division, Section</p> <p>Sample post event evaluation. Why attended? What were visitor's expectations? Did event meet needs? What would they like to see in future</p> <p>Sample post event evaluation of those who did not attend? Why did they not attend?</p>	<p>Implemented action as per Skills Pledge</p> <p>Attainment of Level 2 qualifications likely to increase morale, improve efficiency, increase feelings of satisfaction and feelings of being valued – reduced sickness, turnover etc</p>	
<p><b>Level 5 Return on Investment</b></p>	<p>Minimal financial investment – largely on-costs</p>			<p>To be analysed</p>