

# Quality Improvement - Nova Training

## Overview - the provider's message



“After a couple of very disappointing inspections, we completely overhauled our quality improvement arrangements. At the centre of the change was a greater focus on strategies which would improve provision for learners. This meant prioritising training and development for teachers. Initially, it wasn't popular with all staff, but we made sure that the process was something we did with them rather than to them. It was hard finding time for staff development, but we knew it was

essential. We got the results we hoped for: improved outcomes for learners; outstanding inspection grades; reduced staff turnover; improved teaching and learning grades; and most of all, a culture in which everyone wants to do better, and has the tools and support to help them.”

Advice for others? “Improve communications, make time for staff development and above all, give staff the opportunity to develop provision. Then you'll get a sharper business plan, and better ideas from a mix of people about how their area can improve.”

*David Bucknall, Operations Director*

### The good practice in detail

The quality improvement strategies at Nova were focused on making provision better for learners, at a time when the company was expanding from five centres to ten, and doubling the number of staff to 80.

### How was it done?

The first change was to invest more heavily in quality, by appointing a quality manager and two quality coordinators. Both coordinators focus on the needs of learners; one is responsible for curriculum development and the other for the observation of teaching and learning, and staff development. David Bucknall is clear about how important it is to keep key players in their roles at a time of expansion. He kept the quality team together rather than splitting them between the new centres, to “maintain the focus of the business”. Importantly, the quality improvement team are not all from quality backgrounds. One was a tutor, and the team believes that this helps to keep quality improvement firmly grounded in the needs of learners. “The team's ‘big strength is



getting the best results for learners by implementing strategies that are devised by people who really understand their needs”, says Claire McKeown the Quality Manager. She continues: “The hardest task for the team was seeing where the barriers were. Once they had identified problems, and made sure everyone was convinced that the strategies were benefitting learners, everyone supported them. Managers have engaged with quality processes and the staff recognise that to make it work they all need to be responsible for the changes, and that change is driven by the centres working together.” Julie Stobbart, one of the quality improvement coordinators explains: “We are not just checking that something is done right, our job is improving the experience for our learners.”

*Claire McKeown, the Quality Manager, and Julie Stobbart, a Quality Coordinator*

**Q** *What problems do your quality team encounter when changing teaching and learning practices? How can you identify and then overcome them?*

### **How is quality improvement delivered?**

The foundation is a quarterly quality review of each centre, which takes two or three days, and includes: checking the quality of teaching and resources; assessing feedback from learners and staff; a file audit; ensuring that data are being used effectively; and offering support and training. The quality team uses a standard list of questions, which they add to as necessary, to form the basis of their discussions with staff and learners. They also check aspects which impact on learners' welfare such as the cleanliness of toilets and the provision of drinking water. Each visit is followed by a detailed report and an action plan which is shared with senior managers and the centre manager. The report identifies issues and good practice, which is subsequently shared. The visits have resulted in more consistency across centres, and a better understanding of all the centres and their staff by senior managers.

**Q** *If you have widely spread provision, what would be the impact of more regular visits to each centre?*

Actions identified at the quarterly reviews are monitored at monthly operational meetings of the senior management team and centre managers. Centre managers then hold a meeting within five days in their centres to discuss the outcomes of this meeting. This is to ensure that everyone can contribute to proposals and understands the business direction and needs.

Another vital part of the quality improvement strategy is the observation of teaching and learning. New staff are offered a supportive, ungraded observation to help them understand exactly what is expected of them, and how they can improve. All staff have a graded observation annually, and as a result of this, are given an action plan which indicates good practice to be shared and training needs. Where lessons are good, they are endorsed by the quality team and shared with other staff.

**Q** *How useful would it be for your staff to have an ungraded, supportive observation to help them to improve?*

### Support through training



Bill Buckingham is the Staff Training and Development Manager. He is convinced that, “finding time for staff development is always difficult, but essential”. Staff complete the ‘preparing for teaching in the life-long learning sector’ (PTTLS) training which is offered in-house. For subsequent teacher training courses, staff are supported to attend local colleges. The action plans arising from the observation of teaching and learning are used to plan the programme of staff development, so that it matches the identified needs of

teachers. Staff have to attend sessions covering issues identified through their own observations.

*Bill Buckingham, Staff Training and Development Manager*

**Q** *How do you ensure that the training you offer matches the identified needs of your teachers?*

A regularly updated programme of staff development activities is on line, so that staff have easy access to training and can book when necessary. One teacher was pleased when the staff development manager responded promptly to a particular behaviour problem which was concerning the whole centre, and delivered training about how to manage the problem. The training that staff have undertaken, and the hours they have spent are closely monitored. Bill says: “It’s worth selling the idea of training to staff because they need to enjoy it.” Documents about training are placed in the individual’s file so that the manager has access to them. One teacher praised the programme, saying he enjoyed it because, “I learn a lot, I can take it back and try it and it works”.

**Q** *What methods do you use to encourage staff to access the training they need?*

One particularly innovative aspect of quality improvement is the development of professional development learning coaches (PDLCs). This role, which links the professional development advisor with the subject learning coach, closes the gap between quality improvement and staff development. Bill Buckingham did the advanced training in both areas and devised a four day PDLC training programme. PDLCs are mentors and coaches who can stand apart from the observation process and offer independent advice. Part of their job, as explained by one of them, is,

“getting staff to understand that observation of teaching and learning is as fundamental to being a teacher as teaching - and to helping them to improve performance”.

PDLCs contributed to their own job descriptions, so feel part of the success. It is all about developing staff skills to fill gaps identified in observed sessions. They are trained through the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) and have regular updating sessions for their coaching skills. “We have staff in the centres who are new to teaching”, says one PDLC. “We use open questions to help them come up with ideas about how to solve their problems and then they try them out. We help them reflect on the outcomes and then, if necessary, refine the solutions and try a new approach.” PDLCs don't just help the teachers, they also use their coaching skills to help centre managers find solutions to problems. “Coaching and development needs to be a continuous process. It gives individual ownership to everyone and that empowers them. It makes staff more confident to try new ideas, which in turn, motivates learners.” Some of the main issues they help with are behaviour management, objective setting and differentiation. They help teachers to prepare learning in manageable chunks so that learners are more motivated. One of them summed up the feelings of all when he said: “I love coaching and having the opportunity to develop not only learners, but peers to give a better experience to learners is fantastic”.



*A group of PDLCs*

**Q** What are your strategies for helping staff to improve? How far do you help them find their own solutions to problems?



PDLCs also help new staff. They support induction, have regular monthly meetings with new staff, as well as frequent informal communication. They receive the observation reports so that they can work with teachers on any areas for development. One of them says: “Coaching is very empowering and gives staff the confidence to ask questions which help them to improve”.

*A group of staff*

**What could you do next to improve your provision?**



Answering all of the italicised questions in the Q boxes above will help you begin to health-check your current practice. Download all of the linked documents, compare them with your own or adapt them for your own use. Write a short action plan to get you from where you are now (what is good and what needs improving) to where you want to be.

The [Building Better Practice](#) (BBP) web resource is a great place to start if you want to benchmark yourself against other providers. It will show you the most common inspection strengths and weaknesses for each issue or topic, an analysis of the good practice found on inspection and a series of health-check questions to help you establish how you compare to others.

[Actions for Quality Improvement](#) (AQI) is a set of activities with resources around which you can run staff development sessions with your teams. The activities cover all aspects of the learner's journey and will help your staff embed quality improvement in the heart of your provision.

If you need more help, ideas and resources for the process of self assessment then look at the [Learner-Centred Self Assessment](#) (LCSA) materials. This is a web-based or hard-copy resource to help you generate a rich source of evidence for your self-assessment report through professional discussion rather than the completion of lengthy forms.

[Nine Data Projects to Improve Your Provision](#) is a set of projects which help you use data to explore all aspects of the learner's journey for improvement themes.

The [Self-Assessment Workshop Projects](#) have proved very popular at the Preparing for Inspection events. They will help you determine whether or not your SAR is fit for purpose.

The [Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills from September 2009](#) offers essential guidance on the process of inspection and how to interpret the *Common Inspection Framework*.

The [Inspection Toolkit](#) contains step-by-step guidance on how to prepare for inspection and covers such topics as choosing the right person to be nominee, using data and self assessment.

## **Taxonomy**

### **Types of provision**

Entry to Employment (E2E)

### **Regions**

West Midlands

### **Key questions**

5. How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?

### **Provider profile**



Nova Training is based in Willenhall in the Black Country and has long established centres in Dudley, Brownhills, Willenhall, Wednesbury and Telford, as well as three new centres in Low Hill, Darlaston and Oldbury. It has been providing publicly funded learning since 1992. Nova offers Entry to Employment and apprenticeships in motor vehicle engineering. In

addition, it offers vocational training tasters for 14 to 16 year old learners in sixty schools in the Black Country. It is also subcontracted to the Black Country training consortium to provide learning for disengaged learners aged 16 to 18 through the 'Kickstart Life' programme and Train to Gain.

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