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Tett, Lyn, McGovern, Matt and Weedon, Eliisabet

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Analysis of workplace literacies pilot project reports

Lyn Tett, Matt McGovern, Elisabet Weedon
University of Edinburgh

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Executive summary

This report provides an overview and analysis of eight workplace literacies pilot projects in Scotland that ran from December 2006 to 2008, with the aim of producing guidance for future practice. It reviews the work reported on in these projects in order to consider the models of approach identified by each of the projects within the "Awareness, Identification and Solution" (AIS)[1] model of approach that demarcates between the three main stages of raising employers' awareness of literacies, identifying the needs of employers and employees and brokering solutions to the identification of literacies needs. It also highlights effective practice and how it might be replicated, summarises the lessons learnt from the projects and provides key guidance and learning points.

A literature review was conducted in order to outline the issues raised under the three stages of the AIS model. The review found there were three areas that pose a challenge in raising employers' awareness of literacies issues: employers' lack of willingness to engage in literacies learning; the availability of learning and training opportunities; differing understandings of the term "literacies" between employers and literacies practitioners. At the second stage, the review found that identifying the needs of employers and employees involved designing learning that employers and employees want and need and demonstrating the benefits of learning in the workplace. It was found that the final stage, of brokering solutions to the identified literacies needs through the provision of information, advice and guidance, involved engaging employees, identifying the literacies needs of the workplace and providing contextualised learning. The review provided an important background within which to situate the analysis of the eight projects.

An examination of the eight projects found that there were four main challenges that were resolved in the following ways at the **awareness raising** stage:

- Closing the cultural gap so that the language used in communications with employers was clear and understandable

- Making initial contact through participating in other events with employers to make them aware of the services providers could offer

- Following up initial contacts so that the link between literacies and the needs of business are clear and are targeted at specific employers

- Explaining how literacies learning can benefit employers who may not be aware of the literacies demands of their workplaces.

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[1] This model was developed and piloted in Ireland by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), and FAS, the national training organisation, through their *Skills for Work* project. They granted permission for the Scottish Government to adapt this model for use in Scotland.

At the **identification** stage, providers found that:

- Supporting employers to identify the literacies needs of employees through providing appropriate tools was effective in giving employers and employees ownership of literacies learning

- It was important to deliver a bespoke learning programme that was tailored to meet the needs of individual employers and employees

- Providers needed to capture the views of employees in order to identify their learning needs and did this in several ways - through questionnaire surveys in large companies, through individual interviews in small companies or in collaboration with union workplace representatives

- Ensuring the learning delivered is relevant to the learners and their job roles within the workplace was crucial; tutors had to be flexible and willing to adapt the learning programmes around the logistical needs of the workplace in which they were taking place

- Teaching and learning materials required adaptation to the specific workplace context

- Incorporating materials that employees used in their everyday work in the learning sessions was found to be effective in enhancing employees' learning.

Whilst delivering the identified **learning solutions** tutors faced practical challenges such as having limited space to deliver the learning provision and changing shift patterns that prevented learners from fully participating. They overcame these challenges by being flexible and responsive. They found that:

- It took a great deal of time to engage and gain employer commitment to literacies learning and then deliver appropriate learning programmes

- Employees enjoyed the learning programmes and enhanced their skills except on the rare occasion when they had not been involved in the identification of their needs

- There was a shortage of experienced tutors; this was overcome by providing in-house training.

The projects reviewed demonstrated that there was a need to build providers' capacity to clearly, effectively and consistently promote the benefits of workplace literacies learning to all stakeholders. The **lessons learnt** from the projects are that:

- Awareness raising takes time and requires a coordinated and strategic approach to engaging with employers. Employers considered that marketing targeted at specific sectors or employment groups would be effective

- Employers are often reluctant to engage in workplace literacies learning because they do not think that literacies should be their responsibility and are unaware of the high levels of literacies skills required by their workplace practices

- It is important to consider the wishes of both employers and employees in identifying literacies needs and devising a programme of learning that is bespoke to individual organisations

- Resolving practical issues such as the availability of suitable accommodation in which to deliver learning and fitting in with the work patterns of employees is time consuming and requires providers to be flexible

- Learning programmes that fit into organisations' strategic plans and involve staff from across the organisation, including managers as well as workers, in the planning process are more likely to be effective in engaging employees

- Delivering literacies learning requires tutors that are skilled and have a positive attitude to the issues of delivering learning in the workplace. However, there is currently a shortage of such experienced and qualified tutors.

The **key guidance and learning points** arising from the analysis of the projects and the literature review are:

- Employers can be persuaded of the value of engaging in workplace literacies through demonstrating the impact of low literacies on increasing productivity and profits, which are priority areas for employers

- Awareness raising materials should be bright, use clear language, be short and targeted at specific employers rather than using general materials and mail-outs

- It should be made clear that the term 'literacies' includes the 'soft' skills such as communication and problem solving that employers identify as important

- Providers need to make employers aware of the literacies skills that are required by their workplaces and recognise that some of their employees may not have these skills

- Employers who have experienced a successful workplace literacies programme should be used as advocates to others

- Employers are used to commissioning their own training so providing them with the tools to identify the literacies requirements of their organisations enables them to discuss their needs with providers from a position of empowerment

- Employers should be involved in the planning of provision so that any specific concerns or issues can be addressed directly

- Learning programmes should be bespoke to particular workplaces and be based on employees' job roles and identified needs

- Assessing the literacies needs of individual employees should be an on-going process and carried out using materials that are based on existing workplace practices

- The stigma that is often associated with literacies learning can be reduced if workplace literacies are embedded in training that is provided to all employees

- Collaboration between employers, providers and union learning representatives is effective in encouraging and sustaining employee participation in learning programmes

- Several projects pointed out that in order for appropriate programmes to be delivered funding for literacies in the workplace would need to be consistent and of medium to long-term

- There is currently a shortage of suitably qualified and experienced tutors. The *Professional Development Award: Developing Literacies Learning Programmes for the Workplace* provides an effective way of ensuring the quality of tutor training

- Provision should build on employees' tacit knowledge of their workplace practices

- Provision should be flexible, take account of employees' work patterns, be negotiated, responsive to employees' and employers' feedback and be continuously reviewed

- There should be more development and sharing of customised materials for particular industry sectors across providers

- There should be more opportunities for providers to share information on effective strategies for all stages of the AIS process

- Participants in workplace literacies programmes should be tracked long term to identify the impact of their learning on both their individual development and on their workplaces.

1   Introduction

1.1   The Government's economic strategy emphasises the need to develop skills in the workforce. The national indicators produced to cover the five main areas of the economic strategy, set out in *Performance at a Glance* (Scottish Government 2008), includes the aim of "reducing the number of working age people with severe literacy and numeracy problems". The Scottish Survey of Adult Literacies 2009 (SSAL 2009)[2] shows that 3.6% have very severe literacies issues, while 26.7% may face occasional challenges, particular when

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[2] SSAL2009

they are faced with new situations. In addition it demonstrates that those in employment, particularly higher skilled, and with higher qualification levels have higher literacies skills than those who are in less skilled employment or who have lower educational qualifications. The findings also show that those with lower literacies skills had to a much lesser extent taken part in adult education and training, also while at work, than those with higher literacies skills. The findings shows that these factors may prevent them from fully engaging in aspects of their work so workplaces are key sites for engaging adults in literacies learning. This report provides an overview and analysis of eight workplace literacies pilot projects in Scotland that ran from December 2006 to 2008 with the aim of producing guidance for future practice. These projects were positioned within the distinctive Scottish approach to adult literacies set out in the *Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Scotland* (ALNIS) report (Scottish Executive, 2001). The report defines adult literacy and numeracy as:

> *"The ability to read, write and use numbers, to handle information, express ideas and opinions, make decisions and solve problems, as family members, workers, citizens and lifelong learners."*
> *(Scottish Executive, 2001: 7)*

1.2   This means that the focus is on the skills, knowledge and understanding that enable people to do what they want in their private, family, community and working lives where learning is seen:

> *"As a purposeful, goal directed activity that builds on learners' prior knowledge and experience to shape and construct new knowledge."*
> *(Scottish Executive, 2005: 19).*

1.3   Promoting workplace literacies is also part of the Government's aim of engaging employers and employees in literacies learning in the workplace set out in the Government's lifelong learning skills strategy – *Skills for Scotland* (Scottish Government, 2007). This strategy also recognises the importance of committing to improving workplace literacies, where it is pointed out both that:

> *"The workplace is an excellent location in which to impart skills and knowledge [and also that] literacies learning [should be] embedded in all workplace training programmes."*
> *(Scottish Government, 2007:32)*

1.4   Engaging employers and employees in literacies learning that is related to the practices that take place in the workplace was thus a key aspect of the work undertaken in the pilot projects. This document therefore reviews the work reported on in these projects in order to:

- Consider the models of approach identified by each of the projects and highlight effective practice within the "Awareness, Identification and Solution" (AIS) model of approach

- Consider and advise on how the effective practice is capable of being replicated

- Identify any gaps highlighted by the projects

- Summarise the lessons learnt; and produce key "how to" guidance and learning points which can be disseminated nationally.

1.5 The report is structured as follows:

Section 2: Methodology
Section 3: Overview of the literature
Section 4: Workplace literacies – an examination of the projects
Section 5: Lessons learnt and guidance for future practice

2 Methodology

2.1 The first stage of the research process was for the research team to familiarise themselves with the background to workplace literacies including a brief literature review relating to workplace learning based on the Awareness, Identification and Solutions (AIS) model that demarcates between the three main stages of raising employers' awareness, identifying the needs of employers and employees and brokering solutions to the identification of literacies needs. The literature review is reported on in Section 3.

2.2 The eight project reports were then read, summarised and evaluated using a set of four criteria in order to provide an assessment of the robustness and quality of the reporting as follows:

- Does the report have a clear set of aims and objectives?
- Does the report provide evidence of having achieved these objectives, or if not, a clear explanation of why they were not achieved?
- Does the report give an overview of the activities that they undertook?
- Does the report offer evidence of employer and employee engagement and an account of their views of the provision?

From this evaluation an analytical framework was developed that identified: the models used, including the strengths and weaknesses of the approaches adopted; the project findings; and any substantive areas that were not addressed by the projects. This stage is reported on in Section 4.

2.3 Based on the analysis of the project reports and the findings from the literature review, effective practice was identified, lessons learnt from the projects were summarised and key guidance and learning points identified. This is reported in Section 5.

3 Overview of the literature

3.1 In this section the brief review of the literature is used to outline the issues of firstly, raising employers' awareness of the value of literacies learning in the workplace (Awareness); secondly, identifying the needs of employers and employees (Identification); and finally, brokering solutions to the identification of literacies needs through the provision of information, advice and literacies learning (Solutions/Provision).

Raising employers' awareness of literacies learning

3.2 The literature identifies three areas that pose challenges in raising employers' awareness of literacies issues: employers' lack of willingness to engage in literacies learning; the availability of learning and training opportunities; and differing understandings of the term 'literacies' between employers and literacies practitioners.

Employers' unwillingness to engage in literacies learning

3.3 There are a number of issues that research has shown impact on employers' willingness to develop workplace literacies learning. For example, two surveys, carried out in Scotland, one in 2006, the other in 2008 (Futureskills Scotland, 2007; Scottish Government, 2009) revealed that there were likely to be extensive 'latent' skills gaps where employers failed to recognise that more investment in their workforce could yield improvements in performance, particularly amongst lower-skilled jobs. This was because organisations reporting skills problems were less likely than average to have been growing and providing training for their employees. In addition, the CBI Education and Skills Survey (CBI, 2008) provided evidence that whilst employers were concerned about poor literacy and numeracy skills in their workforces they felt that providing training for what was described as 'poor basic skills' (p17) should not be their responsibility. The report pointed out that:

> *"While employers accept that they are responsible for job-specific training and developing employees' skills to meet business needs, they do expect employees to have developed functional literacy and numeracy at the very least before leaving the education system."*
> *(CBI, 2008: 18).*

Availability of learning and training opportunities

3.4 Employers' attitudes to learning and the culture of workplaces also have an impact on the availability of learning and training opportunities. For example, a study by Ahlgren (Ahlgren et al, 2007) of SMEs (small and medium enterprises) found that the culture in the workplace had a strong influence on the nature of the learning and training that was offered to employees. Organisations with a restrictive approach to learning imposed many limitations on the development of their workforce, whereas those with an expansive approach fostered a wide array of formal and informal approaches to, and opportunities for, learning.

This study also found in general terms that employers from the "Care" sector were more likely to have an expansive approach to learning, whereas those in the manufacturing sector were more likely to have a restrictive approach. They also found that in areas of high unemployment where recruitment was easy, employers were less likely to invest in their employees. Similarly, an employers' survey (Futureskills Scotland, 2007) found that managers and professionals were more likely to receive training than low skill workers, with larger enterprises and those in the public sector more likely to provide or fund training. There was no change to this finding in the "Skills in Scotland" report for 2008 (Scottish Government, 2009) with this survey also finding that many skills shortages were caused by applicants' lack of 'soft' skills such as communication skills as well as technical and practical skills and that skills gaps were most common in the hotels and restaurants industry.

Understanding the term "literacies"

3.5 There is also an issue about what is meant by the term "literacies" as there are different understandings between employers and literacies practitioners. For example, the 2008 Scottish employers' survey (Scottish Government, 2009) found that the supply of labour with adequate oral and written communication skills was not meeting the demand of employers. Additionally, literacy skills themselves were explicitly stated by 29% of employers to be in short supply. However, this survey found that employers in 46% of organisations had made a major effort to address identified skills gaps; another 47% had made some effort; and just 8% had taken no action. This appears to show that employers are aware that their organisation needs employees with good literacy and numeracy skills but do not recognise the term "literacies" and instead look for 'problem solving skills' and 'communication skills'.

Identification of needs

3.6 Identifying the needs of employers and employees involves designing learning that employers and employees want and need and demonstrating the benefits of learning in the workplace.

Designing learning programmes

3.7 Typically, employers identify their organisation's training needs and design or commission training rather than have an outside organisation identify training needs for them (Futureskills Scotland, 2007). The 2006 survey of employers showed that 47% used staff on site to provide their training (ibid). The 2008 survey of employers (Scottish Government, 2009) showed that 60% had used private training providers/consultants and that 86% of training was job-specific, with 74% relating to Health and Safety and/or First Aid. This implies that employers are much more likely to want training that fulfils their statutory requirements rather than areas that they might not see as central to their own needs and the 'bottom line' of improved profitability (CBI, 2008). In addition, employer initiative plays a much stronger role in training decisions amongst those jobs generally considered to be lower skilled (Felstead and Green, 2008). This means that providers of literacies learning need to put themselves in

"employers' shoes" and take these issues into account when trying to engage employers and identify literacies needs.

Value of learning in the workplace

3.8   Research (e.g. Billett et al, 2006; Rainbird et al, 2004; Tett et al, 2006) has shown that locating learning in the workplace can make it much more accessible to employees, particularly for those that have not had a very positive experience of formal education. This is because it draws on familiar practices that can boost employees' confidence and so workplaces can function as 'safe' environments that encourage people back into learning when advice, encouragement and support is provided within the workplace (Findlay et al, 2007). This is particularly true when workplace learning builds on the tacit knowledge that people have of their workplace practices that has been gained through doing the job and further develops their existing knowledge and understanding. However, not all employees are orientated to learning and Barton et al (2007: 18), in their study of literacies learners, have emphasised the importance of individual histories which influence how people engage with training and education through the shaping of their expectations, hopes, and aspirations. Employers too are aware that:

> "Without a good command of literacy and numeracy staff will not be able to take full advantage of the training their employer provides."
> (CBI, 2008: 12)

So, it is important to take account of both the employees' and the employers' perspectives when identifying literacies learning needs.

Solutions/provision

3.9   Brokering solutions to the identified literacies needs through the provision of information, advice and guidance involves engaging employees, identifying the literacies needs of the workplace and providing contextualised learning.

Engaging employees

3.10 Employees often develop sophisticated strategies to help disguise their literacies difficulties at work as they feel there is a stigma associated with not being able to respond to the literacy and/or numeracy demands of the workplace (CBI, 2008; Tett et al, 2006). This means that it is important to make sure that available workplace learning opportunities are described in ways that are acceptable to employees. For example, Jurmo, (2004) showed that avoiding the term "literacy" was important because workers would believe that programmes were only for people who could not read. Providing programmes that all employees take part in is another way that has been shown to engage employees. For example, Barton et al, (2007) found that embedding literacies into common training that every employee undertook was effective in the provision for 'hard to reach' learners that they researched. Findlay et al, (2007) identified that partnership approaches with union learning representatives (ULRs) made it more likely that employees would engage in learning because

they trust that the ULR has their interests at heart. Other research (for example, Ahlgren et al, 2007; Billett et al, 2006) has demonstrated the importance of recognising that learners bring expertise to their jobs, developed in previous jobs or in their lives outside work, in reducing stigma as this approach emphasises employees' skills rather than their deficits.

Identifying literacies needs in the workplace and providing contextualised learning

3.11 Research (Jurmo, 2004) has shown that collaborative programmes that build stakeholder involvement through a systematic, inclusive decision-making process that involves employers and supervisors working with adult educators and union representatives to clarify how literacies will fit into the company's strategic plan for workplace and worker development are the most effective. In this model of provision. Members of the workplace education planning team are encouraged to think critically about how a worker education programme can help the workforce solve both the technical and social problems that impact on their work. There have been some critics of this approach (for example, Gowen, 1992) that have pointed out that involving larger numbers of stakeholders in making decisions about the programme is too time-consuming and may also subject the planning process to too much debate and possible conflict about what goals to focus on. However, others have suggested (for example, Cichon & Sperazi, 1997) that for a programme to be relevant to, and supported by, key stakeholders – especially participating employees - all should be given a chance to set programme goals, have a say in planning curricula and schedules, and participate as resources persons. Opinion is clearly divided about the extent to which it is feasible for all stakeholders to have an input into the programme. The key advantage is ownership of the programme; the main disadvantage is that the planning period becomes protracted and takes time from the actual delivery of the programme.

Summary

3.12 This brief review of the research has shown that there are many challenges to workplace literacies learning at the awareness raising, identification and solution/provision stages of the process that have to be overcome if literacies learning is to be embedded into workplace training programmes. It provides an important background within which to situate the analysis of the projects that follow.

4 Workplace literacies – an examination of the projects

4.1 In this section the eight reports that were produced for the Scottish Government are reported on in order to show the challenges that were faced by the providers and what action was taken to overcome them. All the reports broadly followed the Awareness, Identification and Solutions (AIS) model that demarcates between the three main stages that providers have to address to successfully work with employers and provide learning programmes in the workplace. **Awareness** refers to the awareness raising work that providers have to do with employers who are unaware of the potential need for literacies learning in their workplace. **Identification** concerns determining the literacies needs within each workplace. **Solution** refers to the learning solution, i.e. the learning programmes that are provided in the workplace following on from the awareness raising and identification process. However, the use of the term "solution" could be a source of confusion as it may be thought that this part refers to the solutions identified to the challenges relating to awareness-raising and the task of identifying literacies needs. In order to avoid such confusion we have altered the term solution to "provision" as this section focuses on the learning provision that was delivered by each project.

4.2 The following table lists each of the eight projects, what each one focussed on and how much emphasis there was within both the project and its related report on Awareness, Identification and Solutions.

Table 4.1 Overview of the projects

Provider	Summary/type of project	Distinctive aspects of project/report
Project A	Centred on raising awareness of literacies amongst employers. It also delivered literacies and ESOL learning.	A collaboration between training providers based within one adult literacy and numeracy partnership
Project B	Produced materials to enable employers and providers to identify literacies needs. It also produced materials for practitioners.	Focused on creating awareness raising and identification materials, not providing learning solutions
Project C	Delivered literacies learning for potential future police officers.	Provided preparation for the Police Standard Entrance Test to police service applicants
Project D	Surveyed providers to identify the extent of literacies provision in workplaces across Scotland.	A research project that mapped provision of literacies learning in workplaces across Scotland and produced practice case studies
Project E	Raised awareness, identified workplace literacies needs and delivered tailored learning solutions.	Highly detailed information about what learning programmes were delivered in each workplace
Project F	Raised awareness, identified workplace literacies needs and delivered tailored learning solutions.	Built learning programmes around the needs of individual employees and employers as identified in one on one interviews
Project G	Delivered 20 pilot ESOL courses in workplaces and training for ESOL practitioners. It also raised awareness and engaged with employers.	The project focussed on delivering ESOL courses and provided professional development training to tutors to help them deliver ESOL in the workplace
Project H	Raised awareness, identified workplace literacies needs and delivered tailored learning solutions.	Raised awareness of and identified literacies needs through union learning representatives

4.3   Seven of the eight projects focussed on raising awareness of workplace literacies, identifying literacies needs in workplaces and delivering literacies learning in workplaces, and producing a report on the experience.

4.4   However, it should be noted that three of these projects differed substantially from the rest in that they were not able to participate fully in all three stages of the AIS model or decided to focus more on one aspect. Project A focussed on raising awareness of workplace literacies with employers via the learning providers in one ALN partnership working together to create a universal brand, promotion materials and a website. The report provides limited details of the nature of the literacies learning that took place.

4.5   Project B produced written materials to enable employers and providers to identify literacies needs within their organisation. The resources were shaped by interviews with employers and bodies working in the adult literacies field. The intention had been to run two pilot workplace courses that would use the newly developed identification materials to determine the literacies needs with each employer but this was not possible due to time constraints.

4.6   Project C differed from the others in that its focus was on preparing police service applicants for their Standard Entrance Test (SET). Unlike the literacies learning within other projects, the programme was not delivered to current employees of an organisation but to potential employees who received additional tuition to pass an entrance test. The awareness raising and identification aspects for this project also differed. The police were already aware of the potential literacies needs of their applicants and had identified the need for additional support for taking the SET. However, some awareness raising and identification work did also take place.

4.7   Project D reported on the extent of workplace literacies learning in Scotland, following consultation with the 32 ALN partnerships. The partnerships were surveyed via online questionnaire and in-depth interviews. As such, Project D was a research project, providing a wider context of workplace literacies and, although it did not include delivering learning programmes it did produce case studies of practice.

4.8   The following three sections detail the findings drawn from all eight reports that are pertinent to raising awareness of workplace literacies, identifying the literacies needs of employers and employees and finally the learning solutions/provision that were delivered in workplaces.

Awareness

Initial contact with employers: closing the cultural gap

4.9   The reports demonstrated that learning providers and employers were not experienced in working with each other. Learning providers reported to Project D that they felt ill-equipped and inexperienced in raising awareness of workplace literacies with employers, particularly when approaching employers directly. Concurrently, employers interviewed by Project B felt that those

working within the education/adult literacies sector almost spoke a different language. The areas that providers acted to resolve were:

- The difference in language used within business and the education sector

- The providers' lack of experience in raising awareness directly with employers.

4.10 Providers found a range of ways of dealing with these challenges. Regarding language differences, Project A found that there is a need to consider the most appropriate language to be used when promoting workplace literacies to both employers and employees. Some providers who spoke to the researchers carrying out the interviews on Project D stated that there was a stigma attached to the term "literacies" and so they used the terms "basic skills" or "everyday skills" as they found that employers and employees understood these terms better. Project B deliberately used plain and direct language in the materials that were aimed at employers and received favourable feedback from organisations on this. Similarly, Project E received praise from employers on their "corporate style" publicity materials, which focussed on profit and productivity.

4.11 Regarding lack of experience in the process of raising awareness directly with businesses, Project F found that informing employers about workplace literacies was more successful and effective when they did so as participants in a business seminar. Being part of an established event resulted in high attendance from employers and lower costs to the provider compared to staging an independent awareness-raising event. Project E found that running their own awareness-raising event resulted in poor attendance and high costs. Whilst overcoming cultural barriers is an important first step in the awareness raising stage for providers, the more traditional process of engaging employers with their services still had to be tackled.

Following up initial contact with employers

4.12 Providers found that simply making employers aware of literacies and their services was not enough to convince them to engage and provide literacies learning for their staff. Project A found that few employers contacted providers to discuss the possibility of literacies training as a result of receiving materials, such as mail-outs and leaflets, alone. Employers who spoke to Project B said that they were too busy to read materials that appeared lengthy or did not appear to apply to them. Furthermore, Project D found that employers were aware of campaigns such as the Big Plus but did not view such efforts as relevant to their business. Providers, therefore, have to make more effort to make the link between literacies and the needs of businesses clearer. In so doing they faced the following challenges:

- Mail-outs and leaflets did not always result in employers contacting providers to discuss literacies learning programmes

- Employers were busy and did not have time to read materials that were long or that did not appear to apply to them

- Organisations that were aware of literacies awareness raising campaigns did not believe that the issues raised applied to their business.

4.13 Providers developed a number of ways of dealing with these challenges. Project A found that direct contact such as telephone calls or visits in person, following mail-outs to employers, were essential. This finding highlighted the busy schedules of employers who had many priorities competing for attention.

4.14 To address the issue of inappropriate information materials, Project B produced awareness-raising materials that were bright, clear and short. This illustrated an effective response to the fact that employers would be unlikely to read anything which appeared too lengthy. Similarly, the materials created for employers by Project E used bright colours that employers said enticed them to read. Furthermore, Project A attempted to simplify the information gathering process for employers by creating an online 'one-stop-shop', where employers could access all the information they would need on workplace literacies on a new website. This website held a universal brand created for all training providers in the area and used leaflets and awareness raising materials in order to further simplify the process for busy employers and allow the message to reach them.

4.15 Project D recommended that efforts in promoting workplace literacies to employers should be set within a specific business context and even within specific business sectors so that they would be viewed as applicable to employers. Employers who spoke to Project D stated that marketing aimed at business in general would be viewed as irrelevant to their industry and would be ignored. Similarly, Project A recommended that awareness-raising efforts be targeted at specific sectors or employment groups.

Explaining how literacies learning can benefit employers

4.16 Following these processes, providers still had to demonstrate the benefits of literacies learning to employers. Project E found that some employers were not convinced that their workforce had literacies needs. Project D found that many employers could not see how supporting their employees to improve their literacies skills would benefit their organisation. This meant that providers faced the following challenges when demonstrating the benefits of literacies to employers.

- Employers did not instantly see the benefits of workplace literacies

- Some employers may have believed that the work in their organisation did not require employees to have literacies skills (such as manual work) or that the literacies levels of their employees were adequate.

4.17 Providers used different approaches to demonstrate the benefits of literacies learning to employers. Project E and Project G found that a successful strategy for demonstrating the benefits of literacies learning was to highlight how low

literacies levels can affect a company's "bottom line" and increase costs through poor quality control. Another related approach taken by a provider who was surveyed by Project D, was to demonstrate how having a literacies course for their employees would aid the firm's business needs. An example of this would be to show how literacies learning could help prepare employees for mandatory qualifications, such as the SVQ in Care which is required in the care sector. Project B found that the effect of low literacies levels may be hidden or be unconsciously adapted to within an organisation. Providers could raise this matter during their conversations with employers. Following discussions with a training provider, all eight employers surveyed at the start of Project B were able to identify how they had unconsciously adapted practices to cope with low literacies skills. Furthermore, Project H found that working in partnership with a trade union could be an aid in changing employers' views on literacies. They found that union learning representatives, who were often part of large unions, could communicate the benefits of literacies learning to management as an insider, drawing on an already established relationship. The employer benefited as they already have a relationship with the union and the provider benefited from working with, and through, someone who was an employee of the company but was perhaps more open to the benefits of literacies learning.

4.18 Project E found that some employers were reluctant to admit that their employees had literacies needs, or had the view that some job roles did not demand literacies skills (for example packing or manual work). The project used a comprehension exercise to highlight how employees with low literacies skills could appear to understand texts when they did not and how this might affect basic communication and health and safety compliance. The comprehension exercise, developed by Caby and Walp as part of the training pack to support delivery of the *Professional Development Award: Introductory Training in Adult Literacies Learning* (Scottish Executive 2005), proved to be effective in turning around such views and in demonstrating the need for, and benefits of, literacies learning.

4.19 Regarding the view that some job roles did not demand literacies skills, employers might be unaware of the level of skill demanded by a particular role. For example, a manufacturing plant working with Project E experienced quality control issues on their production line. The line operators, who were responsible for communicating problems to engineers, had a role that demanded high literacies skills. The employer was unaware of the high level of skills required. The provider examined the company's in-house training programme and worked to boost this for line operators, demonstrating the value of their literacies learning.

4.20 Project D found another way of demonstrating the need for literacies learning amongst businesses that was identified by employers themselves. They suggested that an effective way of promoting literacies learning would be to ask those employers who had been involved in learning programmes to provide some form of recommendation or testimony on their benefits. Adding such recommendations to informative materials would lend them a greater persuasive power. In addition, they produced case studies of practice. Project E also used testimony from local businesses in their materials.

Identification

The identification process for employers

4.21 Providers reported that identifying literacies needs within workplaces had its own set of challenges. The identification of literacies needs did not fit in with the way that employers normally identified training requirements. Employers usually undertake the review of their organisation's training needs themselves and negotiate with a supplier; however, the identification of literacies needs is usually carried out by the learning provider. Furthermore, employers were accustomed to specifying to a supplier exactly what they needed. Project B found that employers were concerned that providers would deliver a generic 'one size fits all' training programme, which was not bespoke to their organisation. An employer articulated this view to the project:

> *"I am used to dealing with suppliers all the time. I tell them the specification that I need, when I want the goods and the price I can afford. They try to fulfil my specification. When I deal with Colleges they try to tell me what I can have and it is usually a set programme that is only partially what we need and most of it is wide of the mark."*
> *(Project B: 7)*

Providers would benefit from acting to resolve the following issues relevant to the identification process:

- Many employers did not identify that employees might have literacies needs resulting in less demand for, and less ownership of, literacies learning

- Employers were concerned that training providers would deliver a generic learning programme which was not bespoke to their organisation.

4.22 The first concern was addressed by providers supporting employers to extend their successful practice of self-identifying learning needs. Project B produced materials to enable employers to self-identify their organisation's literacies needs. Once they had identified these, employers could approach and work with a provider from a position of empowerment. The materials were produced based on information obtained during interviews with employers. The final product contained clear advice on literacies and questionnaires and tools for employers to determine areas where literacies levels were strong or weak. Employers gave positive feedback on the finished materials, stating that they were informative and contained useful identification tools.

4.23 The second concern was overcome by training providers demonstrating to the employer that the provision could be tailored to their organisation's specific needs. Project E was successful in observing employers' internal practices and was able to examine in-house training programmes to determine where any gaps or shortfalls might exist. Using this approach, the project created a number of bespoke literacies programmes for different employers including: 1) an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) programme to improve

customer service in a restaurant; 2) communication skills for staff working in a care home to help them relate to residents; and 3) workplace vocabulary training and ESOL for workers in a knitwear factory to improve quality control.

The learning needs of employees

4.24 Collecting information on what employers wanted from literacies learning programmes occurred throughout the negotiation process but it was possible that providers could neglect the needs and wants of the employees involved. Making contact with employees in large organisations might be a challenge. A related concern was that providers had to ensure that the learning they were providing was relevant to the employees' job roles. The Identification process for employees contains the following challenges:

- Identifying the learning needs of the individual employees with whom the provider may have had little contact

- Ensuring the learning delivered was relevant to the learners and their job roles within the workplace.

4.25 Providers had to make extra efforts to identify the literacies needs of the employees. To try and capture the viewpoint of employees, providers working with large employers surveyed the employees via a questionnaire. Project E, Project H and Project G took this approach of surveying staff by asking them to complete a needs identifying questionnaire or tool. Taking this approach right down to the individual learner, Project F discussed with each individual employee what they were interested in learning. Based on the identified common interests, a tutor was employed to deliver the relevant learning at a suitable time and the most popular topics were computing, writing and spelling.

4.26 Concerning the need to make sure that the learning was relevant to the learners' roles in the workplace, Project A, Project H and Project F all used individual learning plans, as did the providers who participated in the research for Project D. These comprised an assessment of the level of skill each learner had when they started the course and what their learning goals were. These were then reviewed throughout the learning programmes to ensure that the learning was on track. In this way, identification was an ongoing practice rather than a one-off task completed prior to the beginning of the course. Providers worked to track how each learning programme was progressing and adjusted where necessary to respond to ongoing feedback. Each week, Project G worked with the learners to review that week's learning and adapted, where required, the next week's learning plans based on the feedback. Project E took a similar approach and also reviewed the learning with management, taking their feedback into account when planning learning for the next week. Further, responding to emergent events, tutors working for Project G, and those surveyed by Project D, capitalised on the opportunity presented by employees bringing in materials from their own jobs, such as stock checking sheets. Adapting the course to incorporate these materials was an effective way of both the tutor and learner being sure that the learning was relevant. Similarly, tutors working on Project C responded to learner feedback that mock exams and

practice questions were the most helpful way of learning for them and the tutors produced additional materials to extend this practice.

4.27 A different identification approach, used by Project H, was to work in collaboration with trade union learning representatives, as they did in raising awareness. Union learning representatives had been briefed by the Scottish Trades Union Congress to identify training needs within workplaces, including those relating to literacies. Project H took the approach of exclusively using union learning representatives' knowledge to identify appropriate training for each company. Once again, the process benefited from the union representatives' insider perspective in the identification process and from employees feeling more able to disclose literacies needs to a union representative than they would to a manager or learning provider who they did not know as well.

Creating a learning programme

4.28 Providers found that the identification process extended to identifying the best way to deliver each learning programme within a specific workplace. Project G, Project F and the providers who spoke to Project D reported that changing work schedules and events could disrupt the running of learning programmes. Therefore, identifying the practicalities of delivering a learning programme was a challenging and critical element to its later success:

> *"The complex job of getting an employer to buy into a Workplace Literacies project was far simpler than dealing with the many variables involved in actually bringing learning sessions together." (Project F: 16)*

4.29 Additionally, some learning providers had to deal with a lack of resources that were required for delivering literacies learning in the workplace, both in terms of teaching and learning materials and suitably qualified tutors. Teaching and learning materials will always require some adaptation to the specific workplace context but providing exemplars of how authentic materials can be adapted to and utilised in a particular workplace was found to be effective (Project G). Both Project G and those who spoke to Project D faced a shortage of appropriately skilled tutors who, whilst experienced at working in community-based settings, were unaccustomed to delivery in workplaces. Providers therefore, faced the following challenges when developing and delivering literacies learning programmes for the workplace:

- Delivering literacies learning in a way that provision worked around the logistical, day-to-day needs of the workplace in which it was taking place

- Tutors needed to be flexible and, if necessary, be willing to adapt the learning programmes they delivered in the workplace.

4.30 The logistics of delivering learning in the workplace can be a real challenge for providers. As explained above, Project F delivered learning programmes around employees' common interests. Being able to put this into practice required a lot of complex logistical planning. There was a potential conflict

between employees joining their preferred learning group if other staff from their department were also interested in that same group. The provider had to plan ahead so that learning groups were organised on the basis of what the learner was interested in, employee availability and the department they worked in. Project F ensured that the learning did not disrupt the operation of the organisation by making sure that only one person from the same department attended the group at any one time. Removing more than one employee from a section for an hour might prevent others there from working effectively. Group size was also kept to five learners, as that was the maximum number of staff that could leave their posts at any one time. Another successful adaptive practice carried out by Project G was to discuss with employers what was ahead for the business in the upcoming months. Identifying times where the employees would be too busy to participate, or conversely where work was so slack that the expatriate workers would return home for a period of time, allowed the tutors to plan when to hold the learning and avoided the tutors delivering to low numbers of learners.

4.31 In creating suitable learning resources, a number of projects used existing learning tools supplemented by original material. For example, Project G consulted with tutors and produced a new 40-hour ESOL literacies learning workplace course and guidance, which was based on SQA units but adapted for delivery within workplaces. Project G also dealt with the problem of the lack of suitably qualified tutors by providing training for ESOL tutors in order to better prepare them for delivering in the workplace. This took the form of a two-day residential course and ongoing support during their time teaching in the workplace.

Provision (Solutions)

Practicalities of workplace learning

4.32 Tutors encountered significant practical obstacles when delivering the identified learning solutions. Project H found that there were times when finding an appropriate space to deliver learning within a workplace was difficult, as did Project G and Project F. Project G also encountered problems with shift patterns; for example, when a shift ended immediately before the classes were due to begin, learners did not actively participate in the group. Project F had learners who failed to make the weekly group due to unexpected shift changes. The practical issues providers had to overcome in delivering provision were:

- Lack of appropriate space to deliver the learning provision within workplaces

- Changing shift patterns preventing learners from fully participating.

4.33 Project F's inventive solution to a lack of suitable space within workplaces was to use a bus as a mobile learning space – this was parked near the workplace. This was effective as it allowed staff to learn in a different space to that in which they worked, yet be close enough that they could be called upon if needed by the employer. The tutors who were involved in the research for Project D reported the need to be more flexible than in traditional community-based

learning and sensitive to the needs of a working environment. Project F found that there were occasions where staff attendance at courses was not consistent. This was due to changing shift patterns, illnesses and unexpected events arising in and out of the workplace. Whilst Project F reported that such problems could possibly be worked around, they also stated that inconsistent attendance might always be a part of workplace learning where there were a greater number of variables and tutors had less control compared to a traditional community-based setting. The reports from Project D and Project G acknowledged that literacies learning was not a top priority for many of the employees involved.

4.34 However, the possibility still existed for compromise and successful adaptation to workplace priorities. During one of Project G's courses the tutor noticed a lack of energy and enthusiasm from the group and subsequently discovered that the learning took place at the end of the daily shift. Delaying the start by 15 minutes so that staff could shower and change at the end of the shift resolved the matter. As a result, the learners were much more engaged with the learning. Also, Project H worked around the potential problem of shifts conflicting with learning by once again drawing on the knowledge and expertise of union learning representatives to determine and negotiate a 'shift friendly' time for learning to take place.

Employee benefits from learning and potential pitfalls

4.35 The majority of literacies programmes were enjoyed by the learners and provided benefits in terms of improved skills and developed confidence. However, learning programmes could fail to engage employees if the topic was inappropriate in some way for the learners, although only one example of this occurred in all the programmes organised by the projects. The main messages on the benefits of the learning programmes from the employees were:

- Employees enjoyed the learning programmes

- Employees enhanced their skills.

4.36 All projects reported that employees enjoyed and benefited from the learning provided. Project A reported employees overcoming their 'fear factor' regarding learning and the employers involved stated that their employees showed greater efficiency in their work, better morale and confidence and a willingness to take on new responsibilities. Project E found that 84% of employees enjoyed the learning experience and 80% of the ESOL learners said they felt more confident when speaking. Project C reported a much higher pass rate on the police Standard Entrance Test (90% compared to 60% previously) for its participants. All of the learners who completed Project F's evaluation questionnaire stated that the learning gained would be useful at work and in life and that they enjoyed the learning. These learning programmes succeeded in delivering content that engaged and benefited the participants.

4.37 However, there was also the potential for employees to have a negative experience of literacies learning in the workplace. Only one participant

completed a course delivered as part of Project E. Located in a residential care home, the course aimed to help prepare employees for the SVQ accreditation of their practice. The course centred on confidentiality practice, as directed by the care home's manager. Learner absenteeism was high, leading to the learning sessions being cancelled on three occasions. The tutor's viewpoint on why the course was poorly attended was that the focus on confidentiality resulted in the learners feeling that their work practice was under threat. This experience highlights the importance and benefit of involving employees in the identification of literacies needs, engaging them in the content of the learning to be undertaken and the result of not doing so.

The ongoing challenges of delivering literacies learning in the workplace

4.38 Several projects encountered significant challenges in delivering their learning programmes mainly because they had underestimated the time and resources required to deliver the projects that they had planned. However, their experiences highlight some of the potential barriers to literacies learning in the workplace that need to be addressed in the future. These were:

- The shortage of experienced workplace tutors

- The considerable length of time required to engage and gain employer commitment to literacies learning before appropriate learning programmes could be delivered.

4.39 Both Project G and Project F found that there was a shortage of tutors who were experienced in delivering literacies learning in the workplace and that this was an obstacle to providing courses. Project F stated that the lack of tutors made arranging courses very difficult logistically. Project G highlighted that the low number of tutors with experience of teaching within workplaces is a "catch 22" situation. The shortage of experienced tutors prevented learning programmes occurring and sometimes experienced tutors move on to different areas if there is no assurance of regular employment, further reducing the numbers of tutors. Additionally, both Project G and Project F argued that a greater number of tutors gaining the *Professional Development Award: Developing Literacies Learning Programmes for the Workplace* would be beneficial for them as providers. As mentioned above, Project G partially overcame the tutor shortage by providing additional training to ESOL tutors to prepare them for teaching in the workplace. However, Project G's view remained that the shortage of experienced tutors was an ongoing problem and until there is a group of tutors who are readily available to work in a range of locations, the continual provision of additional training for tutors would be required.

4.40 Recruiting employers to participate in learning programmes took a considerable amount of time. Both Project F and Project G had the experience of workplaces being committed to a literacies learning programme for their employees, but that commitment was rescinded due to supportive managers leaving or changes in the employer's situation. This resulted in the provider having to begin the engagement process again with another employer. The time involved

in engaging employers impacted upon the time that could be spent on delivering the learning programmes. However, providers worked to adapt to this and provide courses that were worthwhile and full despite the reduced timescale. One project (Project E) was a late starter and so the process of recruiting employers to participate and then delivering an adequate training programme within the nine months of the project was challenging. There was a particular issue about the short length of the learning programme but feedback from employers and employees was positive and indicated that both groups would like additional literacies learning in their workplace.

5 Lessons learnt and guidance for future practice

5.1 The projects and the literature review show that all stages of the AIS model involve overcoming a number of challenges that require imagination, time and, above all, resources. Employers, particularly in a time of recession, are unlikely to prioritise literacies learning unless they can be convinced of the benefits to their organisation in supporting staff to develop their skills. The eight projects reported on here have demonstrated that this can be done, but there is still a need to build providers' capacity to clearly, effectively and consistently promote the benefits of literacies learning to all workplace stakeholders (employers, employees, trade unions, Sector Skills Councils etc). In this section the lessons learnt from the projects are summarised and then key guidance and learning points are provided under the different stages of Awareness, Identification and Provision/Solutions.

Summary of lessons learnt

- Awareness raising takes time and requires a coordinated and strategic approach to marketing to, and engaging with, employers and employees. Employers considered that marketing targeted at specific sectors or employment groups would be effective

- Taking part in events organised by the business sector is more effective than holding an independent awareness raising event

- General awareness raising campaigns are ineffective and it is better to target specific sectors or employment groups

- Employers are often reluctant to engage in literacies learning because they do not think literacies learning is their responsibility and are unaware of the levels of literacies skills required by their workplace practices

- A generic literacies learning programme that is not bespoke to individual organisations is ineffective and unacceptable to employers

- It is important to consider the wishes of both employers and employees in identifying literacies needs and devising a programme of learning that is bespoke to individual organisations

- Resolving practical issues such as the availability of suitable accommodation in which to deliver learning and fitting in with the work patterns of employees is time consuming and requires providers to be flexible

- Learning programmes that fit into organisations' strategic plans and involve staff in the planning process are more likely to be effective at engaging employees

- Delivering literacies learning requires tutors that are skilled and have a positive attitude to the issues of delivering learning in the workplace but there is currently a shortage of experienced and qualified tutors

- Engaging with employers and gaining their commitment to workplace literacies is very time consuming and most of the pilot projects had to reduce the hours of the learning programmes in order to deliver their projects on time.

Key guidance and learning points

Raising employers' awareness of literacies learning

- Employers can be persuaded of the value of engaging in literacies learning through demonstrating the impact of low literacies on increasing productivity and profits, which are priority areas for employers

- Awareness raising materials should be bright, use clear language, be short and need to be targeted at specific employers rather than using general mail outs

- It should be made clear that the term "literacies" includes the 'soft' skills such as communication and problem-solving that employers identify as important

- Providers need to make employers aware of the literacies skills that are required by their workplaces and recognise that some of their employees may not have these skills

- Employers and employees who have experienced a successful literacies learning programme should be used as advocates to others.

Identification of the needs of employers and employees

- Employers are used to commissioning their own training; therefore, providing them with the tools to identify the literacies requirements of their organisations enables them to discuss their needs with providers from a position of empowerment

- Employers should be involved in the planning of provision so that any specific concerns or issues can be addressed directly

- Learning programmes should be bespoke to particular workplaces and be based on employees' job roles and identified needs

- Assessing the literacies needs of individual employees should be an on-going process and, where possible, carried out by using materials that are based on existing workplace practices

- The stigma that is often associated with literacies learning can be reduced if literacies are embedded in training that is provided to all employees

- Collaboration between employers, providers and union learning representatives is effective in encouraging and sustaining employee participation in learning programmes.

Provision/solutions to identified literacies needs

- Several projects pointed out that in order for appropriate programmes to be delivered funding for literacies in the workplace would need to be consistent and of medium to long-term

- There is currently a shortage of suitably qualified and experienced tutors. The *Professional Development Award: Developing Literacies Learning Programmes for the Workplace* provides an effective way of ensuring the quality of tutor training

- Provision should be flexible and take account of employees' work patterns

- Provision should build on employees' tacit knowledge of their workplace practices

- Provision should be negotiated, responsive to employees' and employers' needs and feedback and be continuously reviewed

- There should be more development and sharing of customised materials for particular industry sectors across providers

- There should be more opportunities for providers to share information on effective strategies for all stages of the AIS process

- Participants in literacies learning programmes should be tracked long term to identify the impact of their learning on both their individual development and on their workplaces.

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