

GEEST INDUSTRIES - University of Lincoln

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Work based learning – skills for life

Background - The organisation

The Holbeach Campus is part of the University of Lincoln, is situated in the south of the county and serves the food industry. The Campus has about two and a half thousand part-time students following a variety of courses from basic skills and ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) to degree courses in food processing and manufacturing. The Campus is a brand new 2.5 million build with start-of-the-art laboratories, learning centre and teaching facilities. However, most of the teaching takes place on-site in the many factories around Spalding, Bourne, Holbeach and Long Sutton.

Where the learners are from/how they have been identified.

All of the learners work in the food sector and the University works closely with Geest Industries which has about 6 factories in the area. Most companies employ many foreign nationals and there is a real need for ESOL. The companies contact the University and the Basic Skills Co-ordinator meets the HR Manager to discuss the needs of the company and outlines how the University could help the company. The University has helped companies with developing induction materials, undertaking the language requirements of different jobs and task, an initial assessment of language skills, providing ESOL classes on site and delivering the CIEH Foundation Food Hygiene course for foreign nationals.

The process from initial contact to evaluation of a learning programme is as follows:

- The company contacts the University
- A meeting arranged for Basic Skills Co-ordinator to meet relevant managers to discuss the development of ESOL
- A presentation pack is produced and the meeting takes place and future action is agreed
- A Starting Here programme takes place

- The results of the Starting Here programme and recommendations to the SME are presented to the managers. If agreed, a 36-hour teaching programme is agreed.
- A tutor is allocated.
- Tutor and Basic Skills Co-ordinator then visit the company to take photos, take pictures of signage, make recordings of work instructions, take company information and discuss programme.
- A course is set up for 36 hours; the first few sessions is taken up with an individual diagnostic assessment of each employee.
- Learning Action Plans are negotiated with each student.
- Interim and final employee progress reports are produced and copies sent to company.
- Employer and employees complete evaluation form.
- Evaluation report completed and presented to company
- Progression discussed – usually leading to a continuation programme.

Although not all companies wish to complete all part of this process, it is nevertheless a process which has worked successfully for both smaller and also larger companies.

A project by the Food Forum recently identified that the key driver behind the migrant workers desire to improve their knowledge of English was self-improvement and stability. 67.3% saw it as the way to get a better life, 30.7% as necessary for obtaining a permanent job, whilst 44% said they wished to study to enable them to gain promotion within the company.

One of the most interesting statistics is that of 57.6% saying it would enable them to integrate better into the local community, implying that they may be intending to stay for some considerable period of time.

The project also established that companies needed the flexibility of employing foreign nationals and that increasingly they were the ‘core’ employees and therefore needing operational English.

The screening and initial assessment process

The customised ESOL screening and initial assessment enables food manufacturing companies to assess the language ability of their employees, support those in need of help and to match the skills of employees to the specific jobs. Food manufacturers are increasingly being asked by their supermarket customers to demonstrate how they are

supporting the language needs of foreign nationals. The ESOL screening and initial assessment materials are individually developed for each factory and takes 3 hours to complete

The Starting Here programme is to assess the Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing skills of non-English speakers. The assessment is based on the Skills for Life National Standards:

- Level 1 equivalent to GCSE A-C Key Stage 3-4
- Level 2 equivalent to GCSE D-G Key Stage 2
- Entry 3, 2, 1 equivalent to Key Stage 1

The Starting Here programme identifies the current level of attainment and enables the employee to develop their skills at the appropriate level. This informs the planning of a class e.g. 'Beginner or Improver'. Usually, employees have a 'spikey profile' i.e. their speaking and listening skills are at a higher level than their reading and writing. However, within a class there is always differentiation to meet the specific individual needs of employees. To have a skill level at an 'operational' level, it is recommended that employees are at level 2. Few foreign nationals have language skills at level 2.

When all the assessment materials have been marked for each individual student another meeting is set up with the company to discuss the outcomes of the Starting Here programme. Depending on the priorities of the company, the next stage would be to set up an ESOL class. Time, venue and duration of such a class is discussed. A typical pattern of attendance would be once a week for 2 hours. Courses are arranged for 36 hours of tuition. The allows time for an individual diagnostic assessment. The priority of the employees to gain a certificate is discussed with the manager. In all cases, companies perceive the achievement of an award as important for both the employer and the employee.

Starting Here Report for SME

The report includes a written report and an individual report for each employee. The written report includes a summary of the whole group with recommendations as to the progression. This could be a class with the University, or if appropriate, a class at a local College.

Teaching programmes

Planning:

- Tutor and Basic Skills Co-ordinator take pictures of key activities, photos of signage and instructions, record verbal instructions.
- Photos are developed and those to be used for teaching purposes are laminated onto A5 card.
- Accompanying phrases, short sentences and instructions are laminated onto card.
- A core text is chosen and ordered e.g. SfL ESOL materials or Beginners/Elementary Headway series.
- Dictionaries of the appropriate language are ordered.
- Tutor is equipped with a teaching 'box'.
- A Scheme of Work is developed and includes the 'work' language required, basic grammar and everyday English and preparation for an award.
- Each tutor has a comprehensive Tutor Guide.

Delivery:

- Students are given a Welcome Pack, wordbook, folders and appropriate resources.
- During the first 2 sessions, further diagnostic work is completed and an individual Learning Action Plan is negotiated with each student.
- The Scheme of Work is used as a framework but differentiated tasks are used to meet individual needs.
- A lesson plan is prepared for each lesson.
- Each session will include a variety of learning activities with whole-group work, in pairs and individually.
- A range of resources are used e.g. laptops, PowerPoint presentation, paperbased resources, cassette player (CD Rom and tapes), pictures etc.
- Any absentees are reported within 24 hours.
- Student progress is reviewed regularly and discussed with managers.
- A written progress report is presented to managers once or twice during the course.
- An employee evaluation and continuation form will be completed at the end of the course.

- An employer evaluation form will be completed at the end of the course. However, the Basic Skills Co-ordinator is in close contact with the relevant managers and any concerns are addressed immediately. An example of this is that JEPCo wished to change the evening from a Monday to a Thursday.
- The tutor is observed once during the course and an audit of paperwork is conducted twice during the course. Again, the Basic Skills Co-ordinator is in close contact with each tutor and indeed receives an update e-mail on a weekly basis and any issues are dealt with immediately.

Qualifications

During 2003-2005 employees have taken a City & Guilds/Pitman qualification. The first qualification is the SPOKEN ESOL at Basic Level (Entry 1) with progression to the WRITTEN ESOL at Basic Level (Entry 1). Depending on the ability employees could take the next level which is Elementary (Entry 2).

From January 2005, employees are being prepared for the Skills for Life Adult Literacy Certificates at Entry and Level 1 and 2. These have been chosen because the assessment is less onerous than the Sfl ESOL certificates. It is inappropriate that foreign nationals have a more rigorous assessment process than English language speakers.

Networking details

The Basic Skills Co-ordinator is a member of:

- The Food and Drink Forum Language Steering group
- The Lincolnshire and Rutland Continuing Professional Development Network
- The Spalding and South Holland Area Learning Partnership
- The Lincolnshire and Rutland 'Get on at Work' group

Workbased learning - Skills for life

Mandy Prudden, human resources project co-ordinator at Geest, said: "We do a lot of work with the University of Lincoln. Last year we awarded more than 200 qualifications to people, including BTEC, HND, NVQ, food hygiene and literacy. Training our workforce helps them climb the progression ladder and can offer them something else.

With the English classes it helps to integrate foreign workers into the community and helps them understand health and safety and hygiene. People can't work here unless they have a basic knowledge of the English language. They have got to have the basics. Then people with a need for improvement are identified and put forward for additional courses."