

SKILLS FOR LIFE IN THE WORKPLACE  
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Rolls Royce plc, Derby-a Trade Union approach. 31/3/05

ROWA! has worked in partnership with Amicus (and its predecessors AEEU and MSF) for the past 8 years and has been particularly involved with Derbyshire Learner Champions. Representatives from the Trade Union attend the Derbyshire Basic Skills Theme Group which the ROWA! Director has recently chaired. The Workplace Skills for Life Co-ordinator met with Union Learning Representatives from 3 different business units within Rolls Royce in Autumn 2002 following discussions on that group to plan how Skills for Life in the Workplace provision might be set up at the company.

In one of the units, Repair and Overhaul based at Sinfin, Derby, the 2 recently trained ULRs had just attended a ROWA! Basic Skills Awareness Raising course. One ULR in particular identified his own Basic Skills needs as well as those of his colleagues in this manner. We discussed different ways of tackling the problem and recognised that people would not just come forward in response to posters and notices. An approach from company HR or Management was also likely to fail if a deficit model was used i.e. asking employees to admit their weaknesses in this area or individual approaches to those suspected of having problems from either quarter.

However the timing coincided with the introduction of new company practices using computer systems and more stringent recording of information. We felt people might respond to the acquisition of new skills with ICT as a draw. There is a Learning and Development centre on site with a brand new computer suite, however some people were scared to use it and worried about their own skills which might be shown up in front of colleagues. ROWA! was able to offer a course in Improve Your English Using Computers which combined literacy and ICT skills in a subtle

approach. Learners could achieve dual accreditation in this way- an OCN unit and National Test in literacy, both at Level 1 or 2. The ULR and Co-ordinator together designed a course based around realistic company situations at a suitable level which was mapped to the Core Curriculum.

The ULR was then able to identify and sensitively approach his colleagues whom he felt would most benefit from the course because he had a thorough understanding of what it entailed and he was to take part himself. None of the participants had any previous formal qualifications. The Company allowed him to set up a pilot course in the Union meeting room, far less threatening than the Centre, using ROWA! laptops, at the end of a shift for 6 employees initially. He sold it to his colleagues with the idea that they were the fortunate ones who could take part in the pilot and eventually there was a waiting list before the course started. The last session of the course was to take place in the Learning Centre with access to the Internet so that they could use it in future with added confidence.

Working in partnership with tutors from Derby City Adult Learning the first pilot ran from April to July 2003. All 6 employees, including the ULR, received a half day induction at the start of the course including a confidential interview and initial assessment. They then attended weekly for exactly one hour and 25 mins. to fit in with their shift pattern. All achieved OCN and National Test in Literacy at L1, with the last session as planned in the Learning Centre. One employee received a national Rolls Royce learning award following successful completion of the course. 6 months later, this time through Valuable Skills, the Derbyshire Employer Training Pilot, the same group of employees with the same tutor went for L2 in both forms of accreditation.

Following the success of the first course the Company allowed them to attend in work time and agreed to put the employer wage compensation back into the Union Learning Fund for future training. A second group of 6 did a L1 course at the same time with a ROWA! tutor and in fact some of those achieved L2 in the end. They took their national tests on the Valuable Skills Learning Lorry and the tutor delivered several individual revision sessions beyond the life of the ETP funding to boost their confidence. The ULR failed his L2 national test the first time but along with his colleagues has now achieved his goal. He has spoken about the programme at national and regional Amicus conferences and I recently

heard a training manager from another company relating the experience to Union Reps after hearing him speak as an incentive for ULR training.

Following the success of this pilot a similar programme was set up at the Rolls Royce Hucknall site. Despite full support from the Union the company would only allow one employee from each section to attend, regardless of how the need was spread. This resulted in 4 out of 6 participants dropping out because they were not motivated. Meetings with HR and ROWA! to discuss the issues kept being cancelled at short notice due to pressures on other Rolls Royce sites which the HR manager had to deal with. However 2 employees went on to achieve L1 OCN and national test.

All learners who participated have reported feeling more confident in ICT and literacy skills and can recommend the courses to their colleagues. We hope to continue a rolling programme for Rolls Royce employees and use this case study as an example of good practice when making the business case for Skills for Life in the Workplace.