

Learning for All with Union Learning Representatives

Skills for
Health



Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust promotes equal access to learning.

To improve skills in the healthcare workforce means tackling employee development across the board. Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust has taken this challenge seriously by putting in place a Union Learning Representative (ULR) lead to widen access to learning, especially amongst those who may previously have bypassed training and development.

The Trust covers a large area of Northumberland, Tyneside and Wearside, providing services for people with mental health and learning disabilities. Around 7000 employees are based in seven hospital sites and across a large number of team bases and community homes.

Unison's ULR lead for the DEAL project (Development Education Achievement and Learning) is sponsored by the Unionlearn Northern TUC 'Learning for All' fund. He is based in the Trust's Vocational Training Department and is working to:

- Support Lifelong Learning
- Promote Skills for Life
- Signpost learners who have little or no experience of learning to development and training
- Recruit and support ULRs within their roles.

Since the work started in November 2006, the Trust has been able to support hundreds of staff members who may have left school without qualifications and have not been in a formal learning environment for years.

“We know many people get by on a day to day basis, and those from disadvantaged households are seriously under represented at every level of learning and achievement. Our activities and sessions have shown that we are succeeding in getting people onto courses that help them develop a love of learning. Once they get the opportunity to start learning, it opens up more doors and their learning begins to widen.”

Michael Hood-Dodd, DEAL Project Lead ULR,
Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust

DEAL Achievements

- Over 680 employees have accessed the DEAL project to date
- Winner of North East Equality Award presented by Equality NE in 2007 and 2008
- Holder of IAG matrix award since 2008
- Approximately 45 Information Advice and Guidance sessions provided each month.



DEAL Achievements (cont.)

The DEAL Project has grown to support 19 ULRs who have been recruited from a range of posts within the Trust, including vocational trainers, medical records staff, a trainee nurse, laundry staff and care assistants. All are basic IAG trained, with three at level 3 and two at level 4.

Other initiatives include a Learners Day held within the Trust, to encourage greater participation in learning, whatever people's former experiences. With involvement from the Chief Executive, it demonstrates commitment at the highest level. A wide range of courses is being delivered, ranging from Skills for Life through to undergraduate programmes.

matrix helps to underpin processes

An important element of underpinning IAG was to reinforce the **matrix** Standard which had been achieved by the Vocational Training Department in 2007 by achieving **matrix** Standard for the Deal Project as well in 2008. ULR colleagues who included members of the training team were already key supporters of the benefits of offering a **matrix** accredited learning service said Michael Hood-Dodd.

“ Ask any trade union learning project that has already secured **matrix** Accreditation and they'll tell you the process has helped them raise their standards and improve their service. Securing **matrix** Accreditation is not hard if you're committed to providing the best possible IAG – whether that's to members, or potential members, of your union branch, union employees, or whoever your project is designed to help.”

The Trust's Vocational Training Department's **matrix quality standard for information advice and guidance services** award in 2007 enabled them to achieve a Train to Gain contract and to underpin IAG services across the organisation. In future, re-accreditation will strengthen the training department's role as a source of expertise on IAG for the whole organisation. Work has now been embedded to promote IAG skills amongst all managers who support staff development through the KSF process and personal development

reviews. The Trust has also built IAG capacity through the network of NHS Library staff, thus making optimum use of existing resources.

The **matrix** Accreditation process has been an invaluable process in helping Trust staff reinforce good practice. According to Annette Connor, the Trust's JIF Co-ordinator and IAG Manager, it has strengthened their position to target external funding:

“ Whilst funding streams come and go, the intrinsic value of **matrix** is that it is a widely recognised and respected standard for any organisation which takes learning and development seriously.”

“ The **matrix** provides, in effect, a 'code of practice' which can be widely recognised by all staff, both those who provide IAG services and those who access them.”

Standards such as **matrix** reflect an organisation's commitment and demonstrable track record that IAG is simply about supporting the development of the wider organisation. If there's one thing Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust can show, it really does tackle employee development trust-wide.

Skills for Health welcomes such examples of partnership work which show how ULRs are enabling all staff to access careers and learning support and advice.