



# A whole organisation approach to Skills for Life

## Dorset and Somerset Strategic Health Authority – embedding language, literacy and numeracy training across the organisation.

Skills for Life, otherwise known as literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) skills, play a central role for health care organisations requiring a flexible and competent workforce. Dorset and Somerset Strategic Health Authority recognised the importance of embedding the Skills for Life agenda into existing policies and clinical governance frameworks within NHS organisations, establishing a Whole Organisation Approach.

The overall objective of this approach was to ensure that all staff are competent to provide a safe quality service. Guidelines were issued to organisations, through an established vocational forum to embed Skills for Life in existing processes. The strategy was driven forward with the help of a newly appointed Skills for Life specialist with a background in both Further Education and business, with knowledge of the NHS.

A mapping exercise was undertaken which revealed a diverse picture, ranging from trusts which were taking no action, to six which had introduced the concept of Skills for Life and had begun some activity. This was mainly assessing the skills levels of staff embarking on NVQ courses through to one trust which had commenced the embedding of

Skills for Life into its activities some two years previously. A common theme across those trusts which had already taken steps was having at least one member of staff with a personal commitment to commence Skills for Life activity.

Following this, the Strategic Health Authority built a Skills for Life assessment process, involving initial assessment at induction and appraisals/Professional Development Review into the strategies and policies of its trusts. Assessment was also built into supporting staff doing NVQs. Trusts have been given a deadline by which to set up and commence running this process. Through policy guidelines, sharing best practice and leadership the Authority has successfully embarked on the process of embedding Skills for Life within a sustainable, whole organisation approach.

“ We see the improvement of skills as a business opportunity to improve patient care and to enhance the lives of NHS staff. ”

**Amanda Shobrook** Workforce Redesign Manager,  
NHS South West

A key strategic objective of Skills for Health is to enable organisations adopt a whole organisational approach to LLN in order to support the NHS national agendas. Dorset and Somerset Strategic Health Authority saw how this approach supported Implementation of the Knowledge & Skills Framework (KSF), clinical governance, skills escalation, patient led service and other key agendas.

## The Benefits and Achievements

- Committed members of staff to drive Skills for Life activity forward.
- An exemplar model of successful provider partnership.
- Customised on site training with one-to-one support and mentoring.
- Assessment of over 300 Health Care Assistants and over 500 other staff.
- Shared examples of good planning and practice.
- Framework with suggestions for the development of a whole organisation approach has been devised.

The Authority has built a solid foundation in a short period of time. It has looked both internally at improving performance and externally to start to build the relationships which will make the strategy sustainable and build capacity.

Good partnership work has been undertaken with the local trusts by mapping their Skills for Life activities and recognising the innovative work of their training departments. Attention has been drawn to the commencement of assessment and should raise the awareness of those trusts which have not yet commenced Skills for Life activity.

Organisations like Skills for Health continue to promote the benefits of raising the awareness of LLN with a range of interactive tools which have been developed specifically for the health sector. Our online guide provides a framework to support managers in developing a whole organisational approach to LLN, addressing how to incorporate it into existing systems and processes. It is focused on ensuring sustainability and maximum impact on wider organisational goals.

**Skills for Health** is the Sector Skills Council for the UK health sector (the National Health Services, independent healthcare providers and voluntary organisations). Our purpose is to help develop solutions that can deliver a skilled and flexible workforce to improve health and healthcare.

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[www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/LLN](http://www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/LLN)