

Background

At the steering group meeting in February 2012, the Social Partnership Forum (SPF) requested that NHS Employers delivered a campaign to increase workplace learning across the NHS.

Why do you need to support workplace learning?

There is a clear business case for encouraging workplace learning: investing in your workforce supports long-term productivity and contributes towards better patient care. There is evidence to demonstrate that when staff receive good quality appraisal, learning and skills training, and are properly equipped to undertake their job role, this impacts positively on the patient experience and the quality of health outcomes.

The learning and skills agenda has never been static but recent changes to public policy, increasing demands on public services, and the severe financial pressures faced by many organisations, mean that ensuring ease of access to learning opportunities is more important than ever before. If employers support skills development then they are more likely to be able to recruit and retain the best staff, operate productive and efficient organisations, and above all meet the needs of patients.

Robert Francis QC's report into failings at Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust examines the wider health system and makes recommendations for system-wide changes to prevent similar failings occurring in the future. Investing in your workforce by encouraging them to undertake workplace learning can have a positive impact on improving the quality of patient care within the NHS.

The benefits of workplace learning

Learning is vital for a high performing workforce that delivers the very best patient care. Professional and quality regulators clearly acknowledge this connection by including learning as part of the standards on which organizations can be assessed. Where an organisation fails to meet standards of patient care, either broadly or in specific incidents, learning is the key to raising standards. In addition, having a strong workplace learning culture can increase your reputation as a local employer and can support improving equality and diversity in the workplace.

Within the workplace there are many demands on English, maths and IT skills. Indeed, the Francis Report recommends that the Government should urgently consider the introduction of a common requirement of proficiency in communication in the English language, so that staff are able to communicate effectively with both patients and colleagues. Ensuring all NHS staff are sufficiently competent in English, maths and IT will ultimately contribute towards better patient care.

Possessing and developing the skills necessary to perform work tasks well and progress at work is critically important. In recent research, the overriding majority of learners cited accessibility, convenience and familiarity as key advantages to workplace learning.

Learning for Life campaign - Business case summary



It has been found that the workplace is often the best site for many people to develop their literacy and numeracy skills, develop the motivation and confidence to persist with learning, and get on better at work. Workplace learning is best placed to reflect and quickly respond to the needs of employers, employees and unions. If the benefits of workplace learning are to be fully realized, then it is imperative that staff are given the time off to learn.

Effective managers know that staff engagement occurs when workers feel and act positively about the work they do, their colleagues, and the organisation that they work for. Two major themes in employee engagement are 'supporting personal development' and 'enabling involvement in decision making'. To help staff to feel engaged, managers need to provide learning and development.

Where do I start?

The aim of this project is to increase the level of awareness of learning opportunities, the amount of learning taking place, and the positive impact of learning on patient care.

This can be achieved by having some key things in place:

- Establishing and utilising to full effect a strong network of Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) - ULRs can help articulate the learning needs of staff who may not feel comfortable discussing them directly with their line managers
- Developing (or reviewing) a Learning Agreement - the agreement sets out each party's commitment to learning in the workplace, and the organisational support, resources and expertise required to deliver effective and engaging learning and development
- Ensuring you have a learning centre that fully supports workplace learning - despite changes to funding and learning provision, an onsite learning centre remains a fantastic resource that can help you overcome a number of barriers to learner engagement.

Barriers to the effectiveness of workplace learning

Research has identified a variety of factors that can have a negative impact on the effectiveness of workplace learning. Some of these roadblocks result from organisations that see no value in continued learning whereas other barriers are more subtle and impede a well-intentioned organization's ability to train employees – common problems may include training personnel shortages and conflicting priorities.

Using the Learning for Life Campaign to promote workplace learning

NHS Employers, in partnership with NHS Trade Unions and staff side organisations, has produced materials to support you with your campaign. We have gained national support from education commissioners – Local Education Training Boards and Health Education England. We now need support from key stakeholders from within NHS organisations, including chief executives and board-level members, to ensure the Learning for Life Campaign is a success.