

# Effective staff and user engagement - Nova Training

## Overview - the provider's message

"We have always collected the views of learners and employers, but we never made much use of the findings. We wanted to improve outcomes for learners and also to improve the retention of staff. So we started by involving learners in the recruitment of their teachers. At first they didn't see how this would benefit them, but then they found that they could help to ensure that the people teaching them could make learning productive and fun.

Staff were initially reluctant to undertake more staff development, but we made sure that the training was focused on areas identified in observations and learner feedback, so they began to see its relevance, and to enjoy it. They also felt more a part of the organisation, as they engaged in activities to plan the business objectives for the year, and to contribute to self assessment. Giving more ownership to learners and staff has improved our outcomes and reduced staff turnover. It has also created better relationships between teachers and learners, as they have more opportunities to talk about what makes learning interesting and motivating."

Advice to others? "Most importantly, engage with your staff first. Until they have bought into your plans, you won't engage learners, partners and employers. Have clear milestones and review dates so you can measure how well you are doing."



*David Bucknall, Operations Director*

## The good practice in detail

David Bucknall is convinced that having staff involved with the company's processes is fundamental to getting learners, partners and employers engaged effectively. And teachers really feel part of Nova's culture. "This is an organisation that puts learners first", says one. "Learners are at the heart of our work and they ask our opinion on everything", says another.



Following the inspection in 2006, Nova had the opportunity to employ new staff. The Directors decided to be flexible with salary bands to ensure they got the right people to take the business forward. David says that the hardest job at the beginning was getting all the staff who are located in several centres across the Black Country and Shropshire to work together. The solution was two 'away days' with all staff, one to create the business plan, and the second to draft the self assessment report. On both occasions, all other activity was closed for the day and templates were provided to help staff to focus on their centre's business as well as on local and national priorities.

*A group of staff*



*How do you get staff involved with the business plan and writing the self assessment report?*

The Directors are delighted with the results. "You get a better business plan by engaging staff, because the mix of people and viewpoints gives us a diverse view which is really well thought out", says one. "Staff use phrases such as 'valued', 'supported' and 'enjoyment'. They get involved in the future needs of the business and attend courses being offered through the training programme for next year." Staff see the links between the business objectives and self assessment, and the actions that are taken as a result. The 'away days' add credibility to the process.

Training and development for staff is focused around the needs of learners. They all take functional skills, using a mix of taught sessions and study packs, to gain a better understanding of how learners feel when preparing for and taking functional skill tests.



*How are you preparing staff to deliver functional skills?*

The involvement of learners in the curriculum and in making decisions about their programme are equally important. Learners help to recruit teachers. Following an initial interview with managers, applicants for teaching posts are given an outline lesson plan. They have two days to decide how to deliver the lesson, and create resources, and then they teach a session with the learners. At the end of the session, the learners rate the lesson and interview the applicants. Learners are helped through the interview process by a list of questions and devise some of their own. They enjoy being part of the process and teachers spoke of how much confidence it gave them teaching the group after they knew they had been part of the selection process. One teacher said: "It widens your perspective, to know you've made a good impression on learners." They all agreed that the learner panel gives a clear vision of what learners want and like. They also commented that some of the questions were good at probing areas that standard interview questions don't reach.



*Learners discussing Nova's publicity material*

The involvement of learners doesn't stop there. Every month, with support from their teachers, they evaluate how well they are being helped to learn and make suggestions for improvements. Both they and their teachers value this discussion, and the fact that things happen as a result. For example, their suggestions have resulted in smaller class sizes, more enrichment activities and learning outside the classroom, and visiting speakers. They also participate in a monthly learners' forum with their centre manager.

Employers have an opportunity to contribute to improvements through quarterly quality monitoring. The on line site is open for six weeks for learners, staff and employers to make comments. The results are analysed and sent to centre managers, and if issues are raised which relate to employers and partners, the company writes to them. Employers and partners are very positive about the responsiveness and flexibility provided by Nova. As with the strategies for engaging learners and staff, this comes from listening to them, being interested in what they have to say, and then responding.

The results of all this have lived up to the company's hopes: increased retention, achievement and success, and a large reduction in staff turnover. As one teacher said: "All training must benefit learners...we've got to make sure it works for them as well as us."

## **What could you do next to improve your provision?**

Answering all of the italicised questions in the Q boxes above will help you begin to health-check your current practice. Download all of the linked documents, compare them with your own or adapt them for your own use. Write a short action plan to get you from where you are now (what is good and what needs improving) to where you want to be.

The [Building Better Practice](#) (BBP) web resource is a great place to start if you want to benchmark yourself against other providers. It will show you the most common inspection strengths and weaknesses for each issue or topic, an analysis of the good practice found on inspection and a series of health-check questions to help you establish how you compare to others.

[Actions for Quality Improvement](#) (AQI) is a set of activities with resources around which you can run staff development sessions with your teams. The activities cover all aspects of the learner's journey and will help your staff embed quality improvement in the heart of your provision.

If you need more help, ideas and resources for the process of self assessment then look at the [Learner-Centred Self Assessment](#) (LCSA) materials. This is a web-based or hard-copy resource to help you generate a rich source of evidence for your self-assessment report through professional discussion rather than the completion of lengthy forms.

[Nine Data Projects to Improve Your Provision](#) is a set of projects which help you use data to explore all aspects of the learner's journey for improvement themes.

The [Self-Assessment Workshop Projects](#) have proved very popular at the Preparing for Inspection events. They will help you determine whether or not your SAR is fit for purpose.

The [Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills from September 2009](#) offers essential guidance on the process of inspection and how to interpret the *Common Inspection Framework*.

The [Inspection Toolkit](#) contains step-by-step guidance on how to prepare for inspection and covers such topics as choosing the right person to be nominee, using data and self assessment.

## Taxonomy

### Types of provision

Apprenticeships, Entry to Employment (E2E)

### Regions

West Midlands

### Key questions

5. How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?

## Provider profile



Nova Training is based in Willenhall in the Black Country and has long established centres in Dudley, Brownhills, Willenhall, Wednesbury and Telford, as well as three new centres in Low Hill, Darlaston and Oldbury. It has been providing publicly funded learning since 1992. Nova offers Entry to Employment and apprenticeships in motor vehicle engineering. In addition, it offers vocational training tasters for 14 to 16 year old learners in sixty schools in the Black Country. It is also subcontracted to the Black Country training consortium to provide learning for disengaged learners aged 16 to 18 through the 'Kickstart Life' programme and Train to Gain.

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