

**QIA Motivating Skills for Life Learners to Progress, Persist and Achieve case study: Action Acton, London**

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**Overview:**

Many Skills for Life learners are unable to attend classes regularly because of everyday pressures from such things as work, home, family, caring responsibilities or ill health. This may lead them to dip in and out of study and therefore not progress and achieve their full potential.

The Motivating Skills for Life Learners to Persist, Progress and Achieve project, was commissioned by the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) in November 2006 to increase the evidence base and to develop tools and techniques to support learners, practitioners and managers as they try to overcome the barriers to completion and continued learning<sup>1</sup>

The overall objectives of the project were to:

- support adults as independent learners, managing their own learning
- promote approaches to teaching and learning that encourage persistence
- identify pastoral support, assessment and ICT activities that build motivation
- develop effective and adaptable tools for practitioners, such as teaching guides and mobile technologies, that foster learning beyond the classroom
- develop practical resources for learners to help them 'stick with it'
- develop guidance for provider managers to support whole organisation approaches to learner persistence
- analyse MIS data in order to identify the number of hours needed for learners to progress within the Skills for Life qualification framework
- forge partnerships with more than 100 Skills for Life organisations and share effective practices.

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<sup>1</sup> In November 2006, the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC), in partnership with the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) and Tribal Education Ltd launched the PPA project.

The research findings from Year One revealed that persistence is one of the critical elements in successful learning, especially for Skills for Life learners. The ability to foster, nourish and support the development of persistence is a crucial skill set for teachers and trainers<sup>2</sup>

The work is now being taken forward into a development programme based on findings from Year One. This will further test out and evaluate persistence strategies to enable learners to 'stick with it'

**What the provider did:**

Marcin Lewandowski, Learning Centre Coordinator at Action Acton Learning Resource Centre (AALRC), got involved with the PPA programme when he was leading a small group of young tutors at Acton Training Programme. This was a flexible roll-on/off programme which offered the learners the opportunity to join classes whenever they wanted and Jobcentre Plus advisers the ability to refer learners at any time during the year.

Flexibility, one of the strengths of this type of provision, also proved to be a weakness. Not only would new learners have to adapt to a new environment, meeting the teacher and other learners but they would often join in the middle of something that the teacher may have started the previous week leaving the learners confused and potentially discouraged. This was particularly evident in the lower level groups (Pre-Entry/Entry 1) where the teachers, despite all good intentions, found it difficult to accommodate the new learners.

Marcin became involved in the PPA programme for two reasons. Firstly because he hoped that better understanding of the various factors that make learners persist in training/learning would allow him to look more critically at his own teaching practice and help him determine what he could do to facilitate learner persistence and thus improve learner retention. This, he hoped, would result in better provision, higher achievement

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on the research findings from Year 1 of the Motivating Learners programme, visit [www.stickwithit.org.uk](http://www.stickwithit.org.uk)

rates in terms of national Skills for Life qualifications and consequently better results in inspections. Secondly, Marcin was very interested in learner motivation and felt that involvement in the programme would give him another perspective on this area.

**How the provider did this:**

There is a rigorous initial assessment and induction process for learners at Action Acton which also includes Information Advice and Guidance. The majority of the courses are timetabled with learners starting and finishing at the same time, which helps create healthy group relations.

Marcin's initial interest in 'persistence' has helped him reflect on a range of aspects of his teaching such as formative assessment and motivation which are key elements of the project.

The formative assessment plays an important part in all the programmes at the Learning Centre. When asked about regular and scheduled assessments, learners have commented that although they occasionally find them stressful, they also find them stimulating. Formal tests give the less motivated learners the necessary stimulus to revise. The results are never made official by the tutor; however, the learners often compare their scores with other learners, which also encourages healthy competition among them. The results are, however, discussed with the learners individually and the feedback is used in reviews and feeds into the ILPs - leading to new targets being set. The scores are formally recorded which allows the tutor as well as the learners to monitor their progress.

Action Acton offers assessment and learning support to help local residents overcome barriers to learning and employment. Many of the residents are refugees and/or unemployed/economically inactive. The PPA project involved identifying factors which help motivate Action Acton learners, such as a relaxed and friendly atmosphere, mutual respect, and recognition of achievements. Once tutors at Action Acton realised how important these factors were, they were able to work on giving learners the right experience.

This led to a better understanding of the needs of new learners and those who had been in training for some time. As a result of this staff at the centre noticed increased satisfaction amongst learners, leading to improved retention and achievement rates, particularly in groups where tutors were directly involved in the PPA project.

**Impact:**

Learner success rates at Action Acton have improved and Marcin feels that the organisation now provides a better quality service - with adults able to study for Skills for Life qualifications in ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), literacy and numeracy. A number of learners at Action Acton achieve a full qualification in one of these areas within three months, yielding a 68% achievement rate plus a 74% performance rate for the year March 06 – April 07.

In addition, Marcin feels that the PPA programme has:

- given him the opportunity to reflect upon his own practice as well as that of his colleagues
- made him more aware of all the good practice which takes place in the organisation but is not always appropriately shared
- highlighted the issue of individuality i.e. all learners have their own reasons for being in the class

**What we can offer:**

An opportunity to speak with a PPA programme manager who is responsible for implementing Year 2 of the QIA programme.

An opportunity to speak with Marcin Lewandowski who has been involved in the PPA programme to talk about his experiences.

**ENDS**

**For more information, please contact:**

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Or visit [www.stickwithit.org.uk](http://www.stickwithit.org.uk)

**About QIA ([www.qia.org.uk](http://www.qia.org.uk))**

QIA champions and facilitates excellence and innovation in the further education system in England. The agency aims to help those who teach be better at what they do – improving the learners’ experience and helping them progress and succeed. QIA is funding a wide range of Skills for Life reform and development activity across the further education system.

### **About Action Acton Learning Resource Centre ([www.actionacton.com](http://www.actionacton.com))**

The Action Acton Learning Resource Centre (AALRC) is part of a broad community and economic regeneration programme run by Action Acton, a registered charity and Development Trust.

AALRC is based in the heart of the South Acton estate, a Neighbourhood Renewal area with a very ethnically diverse population. AALRC currently runs ESOL and Skills for Life and employment support programmes funded by London West LSC, LDA (SEAP Project) and London Borough of Ealing (Basic Skills and Citizenship).

AALRC is a Basic Skills centre that offers assessment and learning support to meet the needs of local residents in helping them to overcome existing barriers to learning and employment. This estate-based provision is vital in providing a friendly, flexible and supportive environment for current learners and in attracting new learners who have not been involved in learning before, or for a very long time.

The aim of AALRC is to provide free, accessible, flexible and supported accredited Basic Skills training to unemployed and economically inactive local residents that is of a high quality and is externally validated.

### **About the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC)**

In 2006-2007 the NRDC completed a 10 month research and development programme to explore the barriers that learners face and the strategies and support that can be put in place to help them progress within the Skills for Life qualification framework. This work is being taken forward into a Year Two development programme, which aims to take findings from Year One and test out new persistence strategies to support learners and practitioners. Importantly, the resources being tested out will support provider managers in addressing the personalisation agenda in their organisations.

For more information about developing organisational or practice based strategies to support learner persistence, resources plus regional development and launch events to share development insights from Year Two, visit: [www.stickwithit.org.uk](http://www.stickwithit.org.uk)

The National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC) was founded in 2002 as a cornerstone of the Government’s Skills for Life strategy in England.

The Centre's work is supported financially by DIUS and a range of other organisations. Its remit is to provide underpinning evidence and practical guidance for teacher educators, teachers and other professionals. It is working to help improve the quality of teaching and learning so that young people and adults can progress, achieve and develop the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in life and work and for policy development.

NRDC is a consortium, led by the Institute of Education, University of London. It brings together the best United Kingdom researchers in the field, together with expert and experienced development professionals and a wide range of talented practitioners.

The partners are:

- Institute of Education, University of London
- Literacy Research Centre, Lancaster University
- School of Continuing Education, University of Nottingham
- School of Education, University of Sheffield
- East London Pathfinder
- Liverpool Lifelong Learning Partnership
- Basic Skills Agency at NIACE
- Learning and Skills Network
- LLU+, London South Bank University
- National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, including the Basic Skills Agency
- King's College London
- University of Leeds

Information about NRDC's research and development programmes and projects can be found on [www.nrdc.org.uk](http://www.nrdc.org.uk)