



InterAct Handbook - Articles

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How quality assurance was developed throughout the UK experience.

David Evans

About 30 staff and trainees from Conran Restaurants Ltd., Guy's & St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust and trainees from Westminster Adult Education Service participated in the four pilot rounds of InterAct.

Starting point.

In the UK, it is important for learners to have an **individual learning plan (ILP)**, which should contain information about an individual, and their learning needs, before, during, and after a specific piece of learning.

Before the course began, each participant completed an ILP, which identified and agreed the following:

1. The long-term aims of the course (Eg to gain confidence in order to apply for a supervisor role)
2. The specific short-term aims (Eg To learn how to access the internet and conduct internet research)
3. Prior learning – (Eg I can use a mouse and keyboard, but I can't use 'Microsoft word')

The ILP is a very useful reference tool for reviewing learning both during and after the course. Many organisations have developed their own ILP template.

For tutors, it is equally important to have a clear plan of the course that the learner will undertake (a lesson plan). For each of the InterAct sessions a **lesson plan** was devised to ensure that the objectives of the course (drafted as deliverable outputs) would be met. To an extent this was made easy because the InterAct programme had distinct objectives for each week. These objectives were broken down, and timetabled into the day, together with statements of:

- assumed previous knowledge
- materials and equipment needed
- how and when learning will be assessed
- key skills being taught

Throughout the training

Participants completed the **online evaluations** when required to do so, as did the tutor. Whilst doing this, they also referred back to their ILP, agreed what learning had taken place and made adjustments as necessary to re-align the learning still to be done. This was essential to ensure that a learner was continually reminded of what he agreed to learn, and focused on that learning, so that at the end of the programme there was a better chance that he will have achieved his learning objectives.

The weekly online feedback by the learners and tutor was immediately available for all to see and allowed two-way communication with the course administrator, project team members and the webmaster, thereby allowing discussion and adjustment to the programme for the following week or subsequent programmes if need be.

The tutor could email the administrator if an immediate problem arose. It quickly became apparent that this immediate response mechanism was a vital piece of quality assurance particularly when technical problems arose which prevented the students from carrying on.

At the end of the training

At the end of the course, participants completed the final on-line evaluation form and were given the chance to make any comments about the course both verbally and in writing.

Students also returned to the ILP to agree exactly what learning has taken place (eg Before the course I could not use power point, now I can create a power point presentation), and identified next steps to allow the individual to maintain their motivation and thirst for learning, by agreeing a progression route.

To reinforce the learning and support the progression route, the UK team have agreed to introduce an **end of**

course summary booklet for each learner. This booklet will graphically describe the processes and the agreed learning which took place, and suggest routes to further learning, in order for participants to continue to practice and develop their newly acquired skills.

After the end of the training

Four to six weeks after the end of the course, a **final evaluation** was conducted using a semi-structured interview. The interview was based on a questionnaire (see example); the first part of which was to gain personal information about the learners, while the second part, to establish how much benefit the individual gained

The weekly evaluation sheets asked beneficiaries to rate various outputs on a scale (very little – very much) and add comments where necessary. (Eg How much have you learned during the past three weeks?). While this was good for recording thoughts at that moment, the final evaluation allowed beneficiaries to respond to questions after a period of reflection. It also allowed the interviewer to tease out answers in a group situation, which may not have been forthcoming from the individual evaluation forms. (Particularly where poor written English prevented feedback).

This gave us:

1. An accurate description of the beneficiaries including:
 - o Target category recruited (see questionnaire)
 - o Age group
 - o Whether English was an additional language
 - o Their main home language
 - o How long they had been studying English
 - o How long they had lived in England
 - o Whether they planned to stay in England or move on
 - o How long they had been working for their employer
 - o Whether they planned to stay with their employer, or leave.

From this we could compare and establish how accurately we had recruited the **target group** defined by the InterAct project.

2. Probed specifically what they had learned or achieved in terms of each agreed output of the programme
For example:
 - o Negotiation skills
'Saw how effective using nice words was in putting your message across'
 - o Team working
I will be a lot more confident in a group situation in future'
 - o English language and communication skills
'Learnt a lot of new words and improved the flow of English. Understand better how to translate to English'
 - o Numeracy
Understand how to use excel'
 - o Problem solving
'Working as a team, you could see the problem from several different points of view and different ways put forward of how to solve problems'
 - o General ICT skills
'I have learned a lot like saving a file and evaluation sheet, saving through the computer, adding to a favourites list'
 - o Intercultural awareness
'It is a great opportunity to ask people from other countries about their jobs and life in general for example learning about Norwegian or Spanish medical health'
 - o Motivation
'The programme was very motivating, each week there was something completely different and interesting'
3. We also asked 'Is the learning a permanent change?' Again the period of reflection meant that this question could be answered more accurately than would have been the case immediately after the course.
4. And finally we asked 'how, and in what circumstances could they use their newly acquired skills in the workplace', and 'how they could be applied in their general lives'.

Eg. 'Can readily apply negotiation, tact and diplomacy to the job of waitering and in normal life'

Note - Actual student comments appear in italics.

Some of the processes described may be familiar and used in your own organisations. We found this combination of quality assurance measures worked well with the InterAct model and provided us with comprehensive feedback from both beneficiaries and tutor in order to promote further learning and fine-tune the programme for the future.

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