



# Research on Administrative Staff of Adult Education Organisations

Work Situation Qualification, Training Needs and  
European Dimension.

1st and 2nd Report of the Pro-SAL Project  
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## UK United Kingdom

### Wedgewood Memorial College

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Administrative non-teaching support staff – background information	3
Adult and continuing education establishments	3
Staffing of adult and continuing education	4
Work and tasks of the target group	5
Training needs of administrative, non-teaching support staff	5
Training for administrative non-teaching support staff	5
Summary of main findings	6
References	7
Appendix 1 – Survey Results	8
Appendix 2 – Responses from Organisations	10
Appendix 3 – Sample Questionnaire	12
Appendix 4 – Example of Job Description	



## **Administrative non-teaching support staff – background information**

The research project targeted administrative staff working within adult learning establishments. It did not include learning mentors or peer mentors, as these are specifically trained people who support learners when they are on courses through their learning experiences.

In order to find out what is common practice in this area a questionnaire was sent to fifteen organisations within Staffordshire. The questionnaire was sent to managers of adult learning. Ten responses were received and the results of this survey are included as Appendix 1. A list and description of the organisations is given in Appendix 2 and the questionnaire used in Appendix 3.

The level of qualification of this group is usually level three or below. They will have specific qualifications in IT and possibly vocational qualifications such as first aid or health and safety qualifications. The average salary, according to levels of qualifications and areas of responsibility will be between £11000 and £18000. In larger organisations corporate training is available which cuts across all areas of employment

There has not been any specific training identified for this group this group although some organisations have recognised training needs and encouraged people to undertake guidance qualifications.

## **Adult and continuing education establishments**

The main organisations and responsible bodies for adult education are:

- Colleges of Further Education – These are large establishments offering courses for learners from 16 onwards. They usually offer a broad range of provision from entry level (basis skills) to advanced level. Some colleges offer higher education degrees and specifically Foundation degrees that are work-based degrees. Learning is funded regionally and nationally through the Learning and Skills Council. Accredited and non-accredited courses are offered but because of the ongoing cuts in funding for adult education increasingly colleges can only obtain funding for accredited provision. Students are increasingly expected to contribute to the cost of their courses.
- The Voluntary and Community Sector – These are small organisations that sometimes operate under an umbrella organisation of the Community and Voluntary Service, others are small and independent. All offer small usually non-accredited provision within communities. Funding is through a variety of sources including the Learning and Skills Council but is usually



through other funding such as charitable bodies or as a result of successful bidding to external bodies.

- **Adult and Community Learning (Community based learning)** – This is government supported community learning through the Learning and Skills Council. It is regionally organised and takes place in a variety of places, including specifically based centres, libraries, community halls and colleges. It again is facing cuts in its budget and is under pressure to charge students more for non-accredited learning.
- **Higher Education Establishments** – These usually offer advanced courses for adults and nationally there is an emphasis on the development of work-based skills and the introduction of Foundation degrees for people who are in employment. Funding is through the Higher Education Funding Council and student contribution.

The main government emphasis is on the education and raising of skills for the 14 – 19 year age group and ensuring that adults have basic skills. Funding is therefore directed towards these groups. Government reports recently publishes as well as new legislation have emphasised this. The Foster Report in 2005 and the government White Paper FE Reform, Improving Life Chances, 2006 have clearly emphasised this new direction for adult learning with a heavy emphasis on support for the under 25 age group.

### **Staffing of adult and continuing education**

The organisation of staff in adult learning establishments varies considerably because of the differences in size and also objectives of that organisation.

The structure in large organisations such as colleges and adult and community learning is likely to be as follows:

Head of adult learning  
 Quality and curriculum manager  
 Curriculum leaders  
 Lecturers  
 Learning mentors/peer mentors  
 Administrative support staff.

In smaller organisations they are typified by a head of centre employing part time lecturers and a full time or part time administrator.

All lecturers have to undertake a training course to qualify them to teach. There is no specific training course. However lecturers are able to take advanced masters courses in adult learning as part of their professional development. Conferences are usually offered through the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE). These provide



opportunities for networking as well as updating people on policy and practice.

### **Work and tasks of the target group**

The survey as well as telephone enquires provided the basis of this information.

Job descriptions vary according to the organisation and there is no generic job description. The description usually focuses on the administrative role rather than support for adult learners. The main type of work is answering phone calls, monitoring budgets, word processing, booking courses, referring students to sources of further information, collating students' achievement, completion of student response surveys, and supporting managers of adult learning. A typical job description which is used by a large provider of adult and community learning is provided in appendix 4. This is a relatively highly paid post where there the person is required to also manage the work of other administrators.

### **Training needs of administrative, non-teaching support staff**

The main qualifications that administrators hold are related to administrative skills, e.g. RSA, European Computer Driving Licence, GCSEs, NVQs and A levels.

The main areas of training that managers considered were needed and not currently in place were: customer care, disability and cultural awareness, general knowledge about adult and community learning, both practice and strategy and the skills to provide guidance for adult learners.

A problem was identified about the availability of time for administrators to undertake training and the absence of cover for their work if they did so.

### **Training for administrative non-teaching support staff**

Training for specific skills is offered through colleges of further education and in some universities depending on the level and content of the course. However there is no specific course for administrators which focuses on supporting adult learners. Colleges offer general courses on guidance and courses pertaining to equal opportunity issues, conferences are available which focus on policy and practice in connection with adult learners, but these are usually aimed at managers. Some administrators take NVQs that are work-based courses and assessment but they are related to areas such as business development. The Open College Network which is an accrediting body for adult learners and based on the development of courses according to need offers some units, for example in term of guidance, but not a specific course.

Examples of the types of courses available for administrators are listed below. However it must be emphasised that these are not specifically for



administrators working with adult learners but will be available across large organisations to all staff. Smaller organisations such as those within

the voluntary sector have very limited access to training and will depend on the priorities and financial situation of the organisations. Larger organisations which are likely to work towards attainment of the nationally recognised quality award Investors in people are more likely to offer training and support for administrators.

- Advanced communication skills
- Presentation skills
- Dealing with aggression and anger management
- Assertiveness
- Time management
- Cultural awareness
- Initial advice and guidance

These courses are generally not accredited. Administrators would not normally attend conferences where policy and practice in adult learning is addressed as their role is regarded as administrative rather than engaging with the wider debate.

### **Summary of main findings**

It is significant that administrators play a crucial role in supporting adult learners from initial enquiry and often throughout their course. Some of the most important findings of the survey are as follows:

All have phone contact with adult learners, 50% have email contact and 80% deal with personal enquiries. These are crucial tasks which require highly developed skills in communication, experience of guidance and signposting. Through the survey and telephone enquiries with the organisations it is apparent that there is no specific training for administrators in this role and whether they have access to more generic training is dependent on the size and financial position of the organisation

When training is provided it is usually internal (70%) and only 10% undertook externally accredited courses. This is important because without the status of undertaking externally accredited courses then barriers to progression will exist.

Organisations identified their main training needs in terms of disability awareness (50%), Health and Safety (50%), and the need to have more knowledge about Adult and Community Learning (40%). Only 20% identified Initial Advice and Guidance training as important. Given that administrators play a crucial role in supporting adult learning this appears to be an omission.



Finally there does not appear to be a recognition of the contribution that administrators make to supporting adult learners and neither is this identified in job descriptions. Progression routes for administrators within this field do not exist apart from administrative progression which is not specific to adult learners. Consequently there is a need for specific training which should be accredited to support professional development and progression.

## **References**

Foster Report on Further Education      November 05

Government White Paper. Further Education Reform, Improving Life Chances.      March 06



# **APPENDIX ONE**

## **SURVEY RESULTS**





ORGANISATION	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	TOTAL	%
Response received (Y=1, N=0)	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	10	67%
QUESTION																	
1 (No of Staff)	24	2		7			4	8	50	3	4		1	3		106	
2 Nature of contact:																	
Phone	1	1		1			1	1	1	1	1		1	1		10	100%
Email	1			1			1	1			1					5	50%
Personal enquiries	1	1		1					1	1	1		1	1		8	80%
Support for learners	1	1		1					1		1					5	50%
Produce course information	1	1						1	1		1					5	50%
Other	1	1														1	10%
3 Able to deal with initial enquiries (Y=1, N=0)	1	1		1			1	1	1	1	1		1	1		10	100%
4 To whom would learners be referred																	
Line Manager	1	1					1	1			1		1			6	60%
Curriculum Manager	1							1	1		1					4	40%
Link Worker	1	1						1	1	1				1		6	60%
5 Do Admin staff offer advice/guidance (Y=1, N=0)	1	1		1			1	0	1	1			1	1		8	80%
Type of guidance:																	
Enrolment procedures	1										1					2	20%
Course information	1	1		1						1	1		1	1		7	70%
Venue information	1	1		1			1				1		1	1		7	70%
Progression routes	1										1					2	20%
Other		1														1	10%
6 Is training given (Y=1, N=0)	1	1		1			1	0	1	0	1		0	1		7	70%
If Yes, type of training:																	
Internal	1	1		1			1		1		1			1		7	70%
External	1															1	10%
Validating bodies	1															1	10%
Other	1															1	10%
If no training given, would it be useful, or if training is given, would additional training be considered (Y=1, N=0)								1		1	1		1	1		5	50%
Customer Care								1		1			1	1		4	40%
Dealing with conflict										1			1			2	20%
Guidance advice training											1		1			2	20%
Disability Awareness								1		1	1		1	1		5	50%
ACL knowledge		1						1		1			1			4	40%
Financial regulations		1											1			2	20%
IT Skills										1	1		1			3	30%
Health & Safety		1								1	1		1	1		5	50%
Other		1														1	10%
7 Receive further info' (Y=1, N=0)	1	1		1			0	1	1	1	1		1	1		9	90%



# **APPENDIX TWO**

  

## **RESPONSES FROM ORGANISATIONS**



Fifteen organisations were contacted and ten responded, these are listed below:

Name of organisation	Type of organisation	Number of administrative staff in connection with adult learning
Willfield College in the Community	Adult and Community learning/statutory sector	8
Lichfield College	Further Education	5
College in the Community	Adult and Community Learning	26
Stoke on Trent College	Further Education	25
Voluntary Action	Community and Voluntary Sector	10
CVS Tamworth	Voluntary Sector	2
Start Up	Independent(family learning)	4
Family Learning	Education authority	4
Staffs University	Higher Education (Specific projects widening participation)	10
Staffordshire adult and community learning	Adult and community learning/statutory sector	27



# **APPENDIX THREE**

## **SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE**



## PROFESSIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT FOR ADULT'S LEARNING

Name:

College/ Organisation:

Address:

Telephone:

E-mail address:

1. Number of administrative staff employed who have direct contact with adult learners:.....

2. What is the nature of their contact with adult learners?  
Please tick relevant boxes.

Telephone ☐

Email ☐

Dealing with personal enquiries e.g. drop-in, reception ☐

Administrative support for learners once on course ☐

Production of course information ☐

Other.....  
.....

3. Are administrative staff able to deal with the majority of initial enquiries by adult learners? Yes / No

4. To whom in your organisation would adult learners be referred by administrative staff?

Name:.....

Position:.....

Others.....

5. Do administrative staff offer any advice guidance to adult learners either formally or informally?

Yes / No

If yes please give examples of the type of guidance given:.....  
.....  
.....  
.....



6. Are administrative staff given any training?

Yes / No

If yes, please indicate what sort of training is given. Is the training accredited?.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

If no, in what areas do you feel training would be helpful?  
e.g. guidance advice training/ dealing with conflict effectively  
.....  
.....  
.....

7. Are you interested in receiving further information about the course when it is developed?

Yes / No

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Jill Ward



## **APPENDIX FOUR**

### **EXAMPLE OF A JOB DESCRIPTION**



## **JOB DESCRIPTION**

<b>DESIGNATION:</b>	<b>Administrative Assistant</b>
<b>DEPARTMENT:</b>	<b>Office of the Council Manager</b>
<b>POST NO:</b>	
<b>POST RESPONSIBLE TO:</b>	<b>Area Learning Manager</b>
<b>POST RESPONSIBLE FOR (POSTS):</b>	<b>Administrative Assistants – Scale 3 Administrative Assistants – Scale 1</b>
<b>POST GRADE</b>	<b>Scale 4</b>

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### **PURPOSE OF THE POST**

To provide administrative support to the Area Learning Manager.

### **DUTIES & RESPONSIBILITIES:**

#### **Management**

- To line manage administrators and support workers and delegate duties appropriately.
- Carry out performance development reviews with administrative assistants.
- Administrative processes related to employment of tutors, liaising with Programme Co-ordinators, Curriculum Leaders and Area Learning Managers.
- Carry out recruitment, selection and induction of administrative assistants.
- Maintain order/invoice process for audit purposes.
- Develop and monitor an inventory of resources and equipment.
- Develop and monitor a lost property register.

#### **Development of Community Based Learning**





- Maintain process for learner registration with appropriate validating bodies.

### **Quality Assurance and Equality**

- Develop and monitor central administrative systems as required.
- Fully comply with all City Council policies and procedures.

### **Promotion and Marketing**

- To ensure accurate and effective information is used for advice and guidance regarding courses for service users.
- To ensure accurate and effective publicity material is used for provision.

### **Other general responsibilities**

- Arrange team meetings.
- Maintain existing manual and computer systems and ensure accurate and effective systems are in place.
- Minute taking and related administration.
- To ensure responses to enquiries from service users, colleagues and external agencies comply with Customer First Standards.
- To ensure administrative duties including enrolment, up-keep of registers, fee collection, examination entries, registration in respect of internal and external verification are maintained.
- To ensure the safe and accurate banking of City Council monies.
- Undertake any other duties commensurate with the grading of the post.



## PERSON SPECIFICATION

**POST TITLE: Administrative Assistant – Scale 4**

<b>MINIMUM ESSENTIAL REQUIREMENTS</b> The person responsible must be able to demonstrate:	<b>MEASURED BY:</b> a) application form b) Test/Exercise c) Interview
Good general education	a
Two years relevant experience of working in an office environment	a + c
Experience of line management	a + c
Ability to monitor processes and procedures	c
The ability to type quickly and accurately	a + b
Computer literacy, using Microsoft Office	a + b
Experience of minute taking and related processes	a
The ability to prioritise work load	c
A working knowledge of Adult Learning	c
Ability to communicate well both orally and in writing	a + c
A flexible and adaptive nature	a + c
Willingness to acquire new skills and broaden area of competencies	a