



SKILLS FOR LIFE

INTRODUCTION

Skills for Life (SfL) is 'the ability to read, write and speak in English and to use mathematics at a level to function at work and society in general.' SfL is the name of the government strategy to promote these skills. ESOL (English for Speaker of Other Languages) is also recognised and included in this definition of SfL. It can also be referred to as basic skills, essential skills, literacy, language and numeracy or English and maths.

"Poor numeracy skills must be tackled to cut medication errors" Nursing Times, March 2010

It impacts on everyone in all agenda for change bands, qualified / non-qualified, clinical / non-clinical. If we don't keep our skills up to date we lose them.

It is estimated that:

- 70% of health sector staff have numeracy skills below level 2
- 30% of graduates do not have literacy skills at level 2 or above
- 11% of NHS staff do not have literacy skills at level 1 or above

BACKGROUND

In 2006 as a result of the Leitch Review, the Skills Pledge was developed for UK employers to commit to investing and developing its workforce. The Skills Pledge was open to organisations of all sizes and from all sectors, with a workforce in England in the private, public and voluntary sectors. Through this, employers committed to supporting their employees to gain literacy, language and numeracy skills and work towards their first level 2 qualification. Even though the Skills Pledge is no longer

active the Skills Funding Agency are still working to the principles of the Skills Pledge.

As a result of the Skills Pledge, NHS North West, Skills for Health and Skills Funding Agency invested significant funds to support Invest in Health (for more information please see www.investinhealth.org.uk).

The Skills for Health Academy North West (SFHA NW) leads on SfL on behalf of NHS NW to support NHS Trusts to embed SfL and adopt a whole organisation approach.

CONTEXT

The development of literacy, language and numeracy skills is central to the whole organisation at all levels, ranging from strategic leadership and management to delivery and practice. This includes providing all employees with opportunities to progress and achieve qualifications. The key principle is one of entitlement and opportunity for all staff: everyone within an organisation should be entitled, encouraged and supported to develop their literacy, language and numeracy skills and gain qualifications up to and including level 2.

BENEFITS

To adopt a whole organisation approach to SfL, commitment from the Chief Executive, Trust Board and Senior Management Team is crucial. The SfL agenda needs to be embedded in the organisation to demonstrate senior management 'buy in' to developing the whole workforce. Chief Executives and senior managers have a responsibility to demonstrate their commitment to the agenda to middle management and the workforce. Some of the benefits of adopting this approach include:

- A more qualified workforce
- Supports risk management which leads to safer and more effective patient care
- Compliance with clinical governance and health and safety regulations
- More confident and valued workforce which results in better retention and recruitment and reduced absenteeism
- Supports the QIPP, NHS LA and IIP





AREAS OF RISK

The main risk of SfL is the potential risk on patient care if SfL needs are not identified and the workforce not supported to improve their literacy, language or numeracy skills.

Before SfL is implemented across a Trust and staff encouraged to assess their skills, it is essential that provisions are put in place to ensure senior management commitment and to enable staff to develop these skills. These risks can be averted by the completion of a SfL self assessment tool to establish the current organisational activities and commitment to SfL. It will then enable the development of action plans to identify key priorities. Please refer to page 8:

[NHS NW - Framework for adopting whole organisation approach in North West](#)

USEFUL TOOLS/ACTIVITIES

Consider:

- The development and ratification of a SfL strategy
- Embedding SfL initial assessments in the induction process for all new starters
- Embedding SfL in the appraisal / PDP process, documentation and training for managers
- Implementing a 'Test your Trust campaign' approach, which allows you to test current levels of literacy, language and numeracy skills, in the context of your Trust, to raise awareness.

SFHA NW has developed three SfL best practice case studies

- ▶ [Calderstones Partnership NHS FT:](#) Implementation of a WOA and initial assessments at corporate inductions
- ▶ [Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre Hospitals NHS FT:](#) SfL embedded into appraisals and a successful SfL internal centre

- ▶ [Mersey Care NHS Trust:](#) A case study from the learner's perspective and the importance of the role of the Union Learning Representative to enable staff to access SfL learning opportunities

Chief Executive testimonials on the Test your Trust approach

- ▶ [Calderstones Partnership NHS FT:](#) Chief executive testimonial from Karen Wilson
- ▶ [Mid Cheshire Hospitals NHS FT:](#) Chief executive testimonial from Tracy Bullock

USEFUL LINKS/RESOURCES

The Invest in Health website and eWin include all of the [SfL resources](#) which have been developed by SFHA NW.

The resources include:

1. [NHS NW - Framework for adopting whole organisation approach in North West](#)
2. [Test your Trust toolkit](#) offers practical guidance and resources for staff involved in supporting workforce education, training and development. The toolkit also includes a range of useful resources to support the rollout of Test your Trust. These include a logo, certificate of participation, promotional materials and a thank you email to managers.
3. [Skills for Health initial assessment tool](#)
4. [Literacy e-learning taster programme](#) - available through the NLMS
5. [Numeracy e-learning taster programme](#) - available through the NLMS

REFERENCES

- *DfES (2003) The Skills for Life survey:* A national needs and impact survey of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills
- Leitch Review of Skills (2006): Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills
- NIACE (2004) The Skills for Life Survey: Implications for health and social care organisations
- NHS North West (2009) A framework for adopting a whole organisation approach to Skills for Life in the North West NHS



CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

- Until 15/12/11: Jackie Pratt
Skills for Life Broker
Jackie.pratt@skillsforhealth.org.uk
- Then: Michael Wolstenholme
Michael.wolstenholme@skillsforhealth.org.uk