

Starter for 10...

Some suggestions for your staff i-skills development programme

1. Start with something obvious

Attract people to their first i-skills training session with something they really need. Once they're committed, it's easier to raise awareness of more fundamental i-skills needs. Consider starting with an update session on tools like End Notes or Reference Manager. Detecting Plagiarism is topical and can be a useful lead-in to other i-skills areas.

2. Staff i-skills task force

Give your i-skills provision more focus by creating a small, time-limited task force with representatives from academic and central services. Provide resources to develop a staff i-skills website on your Intranet and link it to institutional strategies and staff development pages. Encourage the task force to seek their colleagues' views on the relevance of i-skills to them – then you'll have a good idea of the challenge ahead.

3. Challenge the myths!

Two of the greatest barriers to participation in i-skills staff development are "I can get most of what I need from Google" and "I'm getting by".

Selling your i-skills programme on the basis that Google is bad practice is unlikely to work – better to play on the success of Google to help attract participants to an i-skills course. For example, "Google: Are you plumbing the depths or hitting the highlights?".

Countering the getting-by attitude is more problematic. No-one wants to hear that their strategy for coping with the ever-changing digital information environment is unsustainable. Nor do they want to be the first of their colleagues to put their head above the parapet and admit that they could benefit from some support. Persuading a number of colleagues from different parts of your institution to test your i-skills programme may help to break into other groups. Your testers

should be recruited on the basis that they are well placed to assess the effectiveness of the course(s) for others in their role, not on the basis of their lack of skills, and encouraged to be as open as possible about the approach taken. If successful, these testers may be useful advocates in their departments once the programme is rolled out.

4. Work with others outside your institution

This guide has already identified a number of support organisations that provide training courses, online tutorials and events for i-skills staff development.

If resources in your own institution are limited, these organisations and others can help to organise i-skills events for your staff and, more importantly, promote them to practitioners.

Staff development for i-skills is best delivered in the context of individuals' roles and responsibilities, so working with professional bodies to reach different staff groups may help to reinforce messages that i-skills are part of professional development.

Why not include an i-skills session at events where your staff are already present, such as Regional Support Centre or LTSN training/workshops?

5. Promoting staff i-skills provision

Developing an i-skills course or event is one thing. Getting colleagues to attend can be more difficult and many providers struggle to get across what i-skills is all about and why it's important.

There are many channels available now to promote staff development – staff Intranets, departmental websites, e-bulletins, good old-fashioned flyers and, most effective, a few well-placed 'champions'.

Feedback from the JISC survey highlights the importance of customising your promotional material for different audiences and identifying specific benefits that relate to their particular role.

If your colleagues think that i-skills is dull or something for the e-illiterate Luddite, then maybe it's time to associate i-skills with something a bit more dynamic.

Talking to colleagues in their own professional groups will help with targeting – for example, giving short presentations at other training events, departmental meetings, committees or special interest groups.

Associating i-skills courses and events with your mainstream professional development programmes will help to get across the message that this is an on-going requirement to keep up with the rapidly changing digital environment.

6. Avoid 'one size fits all'

There is no single i-skills progression path that covers all roles in FE/HE. The i-skills that one individual takes for granted may be the very skills that another needs but cannot master without some support.

Recognising which i-skills staff need to be proficient, and where they should rely on specialists, is highly dependent on individuals' roles in the institution. Offering general, all-comers courses is unlikely to be effective. So how can staff developers balance the need for an individual approach against limited training budgets?

Assuming your promotional campaign has raised awareness of the importance of i-skills and the institution's commitment to support staff development, the next step is to focus on assessment of the needs of various groups.

7. Assessment tools

Helping staff to recognise gaps in their i-skills is a vital first step to establishing a successful staff development programme. If you already use assessment tools as part of staff appraisals, i-skills competence can be incorporated into these. For FE teaching and learning staff, aligning i-skills assessment tools to Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO) standards may help to integrate i-skills in professional development.

8. Accreditation

There is no sector-wide accredited programme for i-skills at present but i-skills underpin many existing professional and vocational qualifications for academic staff. Linking special i-skills sessions to such qualifications will help staff recognise that i-skills are part of professional development, not just a 'library thing'.

Or why not introduce your own 'syllabus' and link this to established courses such as European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) or to National Open College qualifications?

9. Measure the impact

One of the most effective tools for encouraging participation is evidence of the impact i-skills training can have on individuals' performance and endorsements from previous participants.

So, in addition to gathering feedback on the day of the course or event, you may want to go back to participants later in the term to discuss what difference the i-skills training has made. Has it saved them time preparing bibliographies? Are they using new or better digital information sources? Has their use of VLEs changed? Are they more confident using complex electronic information resources?

To encourage continued senior management support, be sure to link i-skills performance measures to your institution's strategic objectives and demonstrate how they underpin the success of other staff development programmes.

10. Make i-skills fun!

And finally, on a less serious note...

If your colleagues think that i-skills is dull or something for the e-illiterate Luddite, then maybe it's time to associate i-skills with something a bit more dynamic. Why not organise a quiz or competition in association with other university or college events that tests i-skills in a non-academic context?

For further information on staff i-skills, or for more copies of 'Starter for 10...' go to www.jisc.ac.uk/cpdresources