

COMMENT

Set structured paths to qualified success

SOME 90 per cent of those employees whom the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education surveyed for this year's adult learners' work said that they acquired most of their skills through on-the-job training. Learning by doing and by being shown by a colleague was the most effective way of improving their daily work performance.

Moreover, they said that training courses did little for them if they did not then actually use what they had been taught, and they had no appetite for qualifications. If this is an accurate reflection of the workforce at large it is deeply worrying.

Clearly, work-based learning is essential. Each organisation has its own way of carrying out even the most basic of administrative and managerial tasks. Increasingly, on-the-job training is used at varying levels of sophistication to develop staff in such a way as to give that organisation a perceived competitive edge. This is particularly apposite for retailers, whether of clothes, food or financial products.

But if we are to be more than a nation of automatons responding Pavlovian-style to the narrow and short-termist needs of the market, then we - politicians, educationalists and employers alike - need to get across the message of why structured learning is so important.

Structured learning is about set-



GAVIN SHREEVE

ting clear learning goals and outcomes, building and delivering an appropriate package of learning and then assessing it - again in a variety of appropriate ways.

On-the-job learning that focusses solely on the processes and procedures of a specific organisation will not provide transferable skills, particularly if there has been no theoretical infrastructure provided as part of the learning, no matter how basic.

There is the argument that the estimated 11m people in the UK who have not achieved the basic level two in learning have had a fear of learning, that the learning they were subjected to at school was extrinsic rather than intrinsic

A properly qualified workforce needs to acquire knowledge that will serve it throughout the financial industry

to their lives. We have certainly found with our hugely successful and fast-growing school qualification, the Certificate in Financial Studies, that its popularity is because of its immediate relevance to the lives and experiences of the students.

However, it is also important for schools to impart a range of knowledge that may, on the face of it, seem irrelevant at the time.

However, the information is intended to provide important building blocks for future learning.

Nobody likes being tested. However, we need a common currency with which to understand the level of knowledge, understanding and skills application that an individual has attained.

Of course, performance on the job is also critical and that is mea-

sured in a range of other ways. But there have to be a range of benchmarks that are transferable and comprehensible in an age of an increasingly mobile workforce.

Employers are clearly and rightly focussed on raising the overall abilities of their staff and therefore of their organisation. Retaining good staff is a goal shared by all organisations. However, employers also have a broader responsibility that requires them to provide their staff with the appropriate currency that allows them to move within the organisation and, if necessary, beyond its borders.

When looking for quality staff, employers will look for the strongest educational currency available, those externally benchmarked qualifications delivered by quality providers.

Employers have a responsibility to get their staff, at all levels, to build and develop their knowledge and skills through the provision of structured learning that leads to appropriate qualifications.

Gavin Shreeve is chief executive of the Institute of Financial Services

“However, the information is intended to provide important building blocks for future learning.”

Please sir: we should learn things that are extrinsic as well as intrinsic to our lives

