

Good practice case study

Addysg Oedolion Cymru | Adult Learning Wales

Following the merger of WEA Cymru and YMCA Wales Community College in August 2015 the organisation went through a twelve month period of dual branding until a new name and brand was agreed upon and voted through by its members in November 2016.

With a new name and logo agreed, work commenced on updating teaching and learning documents, which also provided a good opportunity to review the resources and products that we offer to support learners. Part of this work involved reviewing our learner handbook.

The learner handbook had changed little in several years and had been updated and added to successively. Consequently the A5 handbook had ended up 5mm thick, 58 pages long and contained only two images and as a result, was felt to be a less effective tool in supporting learners. A number of tutors had also raised concerns regarding the weight of the handbooks and the need to carry them to classes. Therefore it was agreed that something new and improved was needed and this was the appropriate time to address it.

In order to produce a new product that would primarily meet the needs of learners (and tutors), a period of consultation was initiated with key stakeholder groups. The first step was to listen to what learners had to say. A focus group gave learners the opportunity to give their views on the old handbook and make recommendations for what would better meet their needs. To support this work, a number of alternative formats were presented to the learners as mock-ups of what the learner handbook could look like. Learner feedback on the existing handbook included comments such as: "it's too text heavy", "it's not relevant for me" and "I started reading it and thought it must be the teacher's book, so I stopped". Learners also said that they would like to be able to read other learners' stories, have access to local information and have somewhere to write down reminders for their next lesson.

In addition to the views gathered from learners, feedback was also sought from a representative number of staff which included tutors, Curriculum Delivery Officers and the Officer for Bilingualism. The feedback was used to prioritise the new content and to fabricate test samples for the new handbook.

The samples were tested through further consultation with stakeholders in order to arrive at a product that would best meet the needs of the learner, the tutor and the organisation. Consequently the new learner handbook is now a much more concise and manageable A6 bilingual pocket guide. It contains inspiring learner stories, useful contact numbers, information regarding funding and learner support as well as guidance on plagiarism, malpractice and a learner code of conduct. Also to support teaching and learning, the pocket guide now contains a literacy marking guide, a 10 week planner and additional note pages on which to make annotations.

To date the new handbook has been well received, but a further consultation with learners will be conducted before the end of the academic year to identify if any revisions are required before the next print run is made. In addition work is currently being conducted to make an electronic learner guide available online when the new website is launched.