



Developing the Language Skills of Civil Servants

Department for Education

The Department for Education (DfE) is responsible for education and children's services in England. The DfE works to achieve a highly educated society in which opportunity is equal for children and young people, no matter what their background or family circumstances. DfE staff are based at the ministerial offices in London and in a number of other locations around England.

Communicaid

Communicaid is a global culture and communication skills consultancy that assists the world's leading organisations to mitigate the risks and maximise the opportunities of working in a complex and ever-changing international environment. We work with international organisations such as the Department for Education to provide a complete suite of consultancy services as well as targeted intercultural, language and communication skills training.

Developing the Foreign Language Competency of DfE Staff

Following the Department for Education's review of its training policy and consequent formulation of a new strategy, Communicaid was selected as the DfE language training supplier in March 2004. The framework agreement, awarded to Communicaid by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in 2003, was extended to cover all the legal aspects of engagement within the DfE while a detailed Service Level agreement was agreed directly between Communicaid and DfE Learning Academy.

Training Objectives

The DfE policy review identified the following priority areas:

- Provide effective training for Fast Stream (UK civil service's accelerated development programme)
- Provide an effective system of external validation/accreditation system for all work-related training
- Rationalise spend and focus on work-related language training with clearly defined content

in support of departmental business needs

- Devise innovative programmes in support of personal development and methods for maintaining participants' current level of proficiency in a foreign language

and cultural awareness needs of civil servants who would be taking part in meetings with EU officials

- The development and consistent implementation of a new approach to language training across the Department's four sites in the UK - London, Sheffield, Runcorn and Darlington

Challenges

The main challenges were seen as:

- The design of a series of workshops that integrated the linguistic

Training Approach

Communicaid carried out an extensive language competency audit, consisting of individual assessments of over 100 delegates to identify common needs and language competency levels. All delegates, who were identified to attend cultural awareness training, were required to complete a pre-course questionnaire in order to ensure that the course content was suitably tailored.

Our Solution

The following solution was designed:

- Introduction of European Language Portfolios and Common European Framework assessment scale for all training across the Department together with alignment of training programmes to appropriate external qualifications
- Small group training for delegates with compatible levels and similar business needs
- Organisation of individual flexible programmes for Fast Stream with an option of transferring training between London and Brussels

- Intensive immersion training at Communicaid's Paris training centre for senior civil servant in the European Union Division
- Organisation of several language clubs in major west European languages and Russian to facilitate personal development and maintenance of language competence
- Efficient programme administration and monthly reporting to all departments, including financial spend and consumption of training
- Delivery of workshops in advanced language skills in key EU languages
- Provision of European cross-cultural training

Results

The DfE is now able to develop, assess and monitor the linguistic competence of civil servants in their work with international colleagues. It is also able to monitor spend effectively and measure outcomes of training interventions in the area of cultural and linguistic skills.

Civil servants taking part in the UK's EU Presidency events are now familiar with the diverse cultural background of their European counterparts and can deal effectively with overseas visitors to the Department. Through their professional competence in foreign language skills they will be able to raise the profile of the UK Civil Service in an international arena.

Communicaid efficiently prepared over seventy DfE language volunteers for their role as delegation liaison officers for ministerial meetings during the UK EU Presidency 2005. Courses were well prepared, relevant and covered a broad range of European languages.

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