

NEYSDP Insights

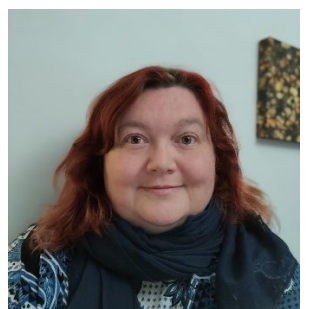


An opportunity for colleagues to share experiences, practice and learning from across the network

Mandatory Training during Lockdown

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In 2017 our Vice Chancellor announced that **all** our managers should become chartered managers with the CMI. As an organisation we'd already put in place expectations that all academics would have a PhD and, as teaching staff, they would become Fellows of Higher Education Academy (now Advance HE), so this approach was not new, but it was the first time our team had been responsible for administering one of these long-term mandatory programmes. There was a lot to manage, both in terms of delivering an assessed qualification, but also in supporting large groups of staff through the work.

Two new members of the team who had set up and assessed qualifications in past roles set up the Level 7 qualification (which would allow our strategic managers to apply for Chartered Manager status) - they implemented the processes and paperwork, developed the project plan and managed the first cohort. That cohort was 110 members of our University Management Group, from Schools and Professional Services.

Cohort (C)2 (90 Participants) started in September 2018; I was jointly responsible for with one of my colleagues who had been involved in C1. C3 (70 Participants) I took on as a solo project in September 2019 with the programme running until May 2020 (you know that didn't play out as we expected!).

C4 (70 Participants) completed during lockdown and C5 (60 participants) started September 2021 and again will finish in May. We are currently planning for the roll out of the new CMI syllabus for next year's cohort. All our groups are a mixture of academics and professional services staff, with a mixture of varying levels of academic experience and writing confidence.

Results/Benefits -

When I took on the project, there was lots that was working. The structure of the course, the assignment briefs, the main supporting activities were all in place. Evaluations were good, although there was, as you might imagine with a mandatory course on this scale, a sense of participant frustration about managing the course alongside existing workloads.

Lessons Learnt -

I had a real advantage in taking the project forward. I knew some of the participants, so that made working with groups easier. Becoming the person that they saw as responsible for the programme was a challenge. If one person in the room knows me and is happy(ish) to see me, other people are less likely to see me as the enemy. There were, of course, still a few 'interesting' moments!

Some of those challenges came from the way colleagues from the Schools and Services were told they were participating. Assumptions were made about the clarity of the purpose of the project. We now have a longer, more clearly defined nomination process which helps with some of that. Being clear about who should be nominated, when they should be told, and what the criteria is for deferral helps.

Knowing people also means you get more questions, which allows you to design materials that answer some of those questions more clearly. I think in some regards this was easier for me to do as I was answering the daily questions, reading assignment drafts, and trying to understand the process myself and could therefore see more clearly what was obvious to participants and what they were struggling with. Some of the most useful things I have done (at least according to the participants) are design a 10-point 'quick start' checklist to help the new cohort navigate all the necessary things they need to read, book on, and participate with, also writing a tutorial checklist that tells people what I'm looking for when I review their assignment decoding some of the assignment brief.

Next steps -

Our next big challenge is the complete rewrite of the syllabus for the CMI Level 7 for next year. We have two totally new assignments that need to be developed to maintain the quality of the participants' experience.

What key tips/pieces of insight would you give yourself if you were starting again?

- i. The most obvious one? Kindness and empathy. Be as appreciative of the demanding work and challenges for participants as possible. (I know you know this was even more important during lockdown). Running a mandatory course means that people feel an inordinate amount of pressure to be successful. And be aware of the emotional toll that speaking to that many distressed people is likely to take.
- ii. Communicate, communicate, and communicate some more. Using MS Teams has massively helped in this regard as that acts as a central repository for resources, as a comms channel and in setting up the channels helps explain the content to participants. It's a useful organisational tool. Fundamentally I want participants to feel like they understand the process well enough to feel they are being successful.
- iii. Make all messages and the assessment instructions as clear as possible. Give people links to stuff. I really want people to focus on their application of theory and reflecting on their own practice, rather than worrying about finding material and structuring their answers. The CMI resources help with that, but then it's about linking people back to those materials at every opportunity.
And more generally...
- iv. Do not underestimate the amount of organisation needed and the amount of time the admin is going to take. Set aside time for those activities around key dates in the diary. Write everything down. During C2 and C3, I was regularly asked for data, and asked to organise things that were not in the project plan. Graduation, allocating work to the marking team, following up extension requests, deferrals.

What have you enjoyed/learnt working on the project/piece of work?

This has been a really challenging process, asking busy managers to take on an additional qualification during lockdown is difficult and I have had lots of tough conversations with stressed colleagues who needed advice on how to get this done.

What has amazed me is the quality of the work, and I have loved reading their assignments, not only to see how they are applying their learning but also to understand the organisation in a much richer way. Academics introduce richness and challenge into the process and some participants are willing to open themselves up to the learning that comes from the reflective element of the programme. Some of my favourite assignments critique current practice, the ideas from the reading list or the process and allow me to understand leadership in a richer way. Plus, because they are provided with a head-start on the reading, lots of them have done the additional work and introduced me to interesting authors.

Fundamentally, it has been a wonderful way to learn about the organisation, build great working relationships and sow the seeds for other work. Working one-to-one with people for tutorials is a good way to appreciate their individual challenges and up my listening and influence skills.

Testimonials

My favourite testimonials are the surprised people telling me that they've found the process useful, even though they were sceptical at the beginning and academics telling me that they are applying some of my scaffolding strategies with their own students. And one of the professors, who has participated this year, telling me that after reading his assignments I probably knew him better than most of his other colleagues.

How can we find out more?

Contact me at Helen.walker@hud.ac.uk