

Care Skillsbase: Manage Skills

Raise awareness

These handouts are designed to support discussion at meetings to raise awareness about how care organisations can take a systematic approach to supporting the way staff communicate and deal with information. They may be used in any order.

Contents

1. What are communication and number skills?

Number of words: 1,125

Approximate reading time: 10 minutes

2. Test the case for communication and number skills

Number of words: 300

Approximate reading time: 3 minutes

3. Do we pay enough attention to communication and number skills?

Number of words: 350

Approximate reading time: 3.5 minutes

4. What does it mean to take a systematic approach?

Number of words: 175

Approximate reading time: 2 minutes

5. Core employability skills for a health and social care worker

Number of words: 300

Approximate reading time: 3 minutes

Handout 1

What are communication and number skills?

All jobs require staff to communicate and deal with information. To do this, staff use:

- spoken communication skills
- written communication (reading and writing) skills
- number skills, including time-keeping, money, weights and measures.

Workforce standards for the care sector – the Common Induction Standards (CIS) and health and social care qualifications – help to identify exactly where staff must apply these skills to maintain safety and quality.

Other names for communication and number skills include basic skills, Skills for Life, functional skills, key skills, essential skills and adult literacy and numeracy. Whatever we call them, a common definition of these skills is, 'The ability to use English and maths at a level necessary to function and progress at work and in society.'

Government research suggests that as many as one adult in five lacks the communication and/or number skills they need. Care sector research shows that the same proportion of the care workforce – one in five – may lack these skills, including managers and professionally qualified staff.

To define exactly what we mean by communication and number skills, the government has created a number of standards, including the Adult Literacy and Numeracy standards and Functional Skills standards.

The rest of this handout outlines what the skills mean for care staff.

Spoken communication

Typical **spoken communication** skills include:

- asking and answering questions
- issuing and following instructions
- giving and asking for explanations
- making and responding to suggestions
- giving and receiving information by telephone.

We ask staff to apply **spoken communication** skills in many different situations. Here are some examples.

- Interact appropriately (e.g. using correct terminology and appropriate language) with
 - > people who use services, their family and friends
 - > colleagues
 - > people from external agencies.
- Participate actively in
 - > team meetings
 - > supervision
 - > appraisal
 - > training.

What other examples, relevant to staff in this organisation, can you add?

Written communication – reading

Typical **reading** skills include:

- skimming quickly to get the gist (e.g. ‘What’s this letter all about?’)
- scanning for specific information (e.g. ‘What date is the appointment on?’)
- careful reading for detail (e.g. ‘How much water do I use with this product?’).

Information we typically ask staff to **read** includes:

- policies, procedures, standards and regulations
- health and safety information
- job and task documentation (e.g. job descriptions, rotas, appraisal forms, equipment instructions, care plans, product labels, risk assessments)
- workplace signs and notices
- emails, websites and other computer-based information
- training materials
- employment documentation (contracts, pay slips, handbooks, claim forms etc.).

What other examples, relevant to staff in this organisation, can you add?

Written communication – writing

Typical **writing** skills include:

- legible handwriting
- keyboard skills and word-processing knowledge
- ability to spell and punctuate accurately
- knowledge of different types of writing (e.g. letters, reports, forms, emails etc.)
- form-filling
- note-taking
- summarising.

Situations in which we ask staff to apply **writing** skills include:

- shift hand-over notes
- contributing to care plans
- filling out timesheets
- leaving messages and notes for colleagues
- completing order forms
- completing incident reports
- writing letters.

What other examples, relevant to staff in this organisation, can you add?

Other communication skills

In addition to the skills listed above, there are others just as important. These include:

- knowing how to be polite and respectful
- telling the difference between fact and opinion
- saying 'no' without giving offence
- recognising non-verbal communication (e.g. body language)
- responding appropriately to challenging behaviour.

What other examples, relevant to staff in this organisation, can you add?

Number skills

Typical **number** skills include:

- four rules of arithmetic (addition, subtraction, multiplication, division)
- fractions and ratios
- decimals and percentages
- measurement (e.g. weight, fluid volume, temperature)
- charts, graphs, tables
- time (12- and 24-hour clock)
- using a calculator
- estimation and ability to recognise error.

Situations in which we ask staff to apply **number** skills include:

- monitoring service users (e.g. monitoring weight, fluid intake, body temperature)
- dealing with service users' money
- using equipment and materials (e.g. mixing products to a ratio)
- resource management (e.g. stock-taking, ordering supplies)
- time management and prioritisation of work
- employment admin (e.g. pay slips, timesheets, timetables and rotas).

What other examples, relevant to staff in this organisation, would you add?

What about staff from abroad?

Staff from abroad often come with strong skills and considerable experience. However, they may not speak a great deal of English and they may be unfamiliar with the culture of care in the UK. This can result in a range of problems for them, their colleagues and the people they are caring for.

Can you give any examples, relevant to this organisation, of typical problems?

Dyslexia

Dyslexia means difficulty with the written word. We are still finding out about dyslexia, but research suggests that a proportion of otherwise completely normal people find it difficult to learn to read. If they are not helped properly at school – where almost all learning is based on reading – they may fall behind and be wrongly labelled as failures.

People who have had this negative experience as children sometimes prefer to suffer in silence when they are adults and simply avoid written communication whenever they can.

Fortunately, it is possible to help dyslexic adults to develop their skills and confidence with written communication (see the Manage Skills section of the Care Skillsbase website at www.scie.org.uk/careskillsbase).

Confidence

Have you ever:

- been on holiday in a country where you don't speak the language?
- gone to a party where you don't know anyone?
- been left in charge when you don't know what to do?

If so, then you probably know what it is like to lack confidence in yourself.

Staff who aren't confident of their communication and number skills may lack confidence in other areas too. They may be:

- unwilling to contribute at meetings
- defensive about mistakes and sensitive to criticism
- abrupt with others
- nervous about working with people they don't know
- reluctant to carry out certain tasks, take on new responsibilities, undergo training
- flustered when asked to do something in a new or different way.

What other examples, relevant to staff in this organisation, can you add?

Discussion points

1. How likely is it that this organisation employs staff who, for whatever reason, may find it difficult to apply the communication and number skills their jobs demand?
2. How might this affect the member of staff's performance?
3. How might it impact on the performance of the organisation as a whole?
4. What do you think this organisation could usefully do to help staff apply communication and number skills effectively?

Handout 2

Test the case for communication and number skills

The statements below make a business case for actively managing communication and number skills. Are you convinced?

1. To deliver safe, high-quality care, our organisation needs to:

- understand the needs and preferences of people who use services
- agree and plan appropriate care
- make best use of available resources
- work in partnership with others
- monitor and record services
- review how to improve services
- comply with regulation
- evidence good practice at inspection.

Yes, I agree No, I don't agree

2. For our organisation to do that, staff must:

- understand policies, procedures, standards and regulations
- interact effectively with people who use services, their families and friends
- interact effectively with colleagues and other agencies
- keep accurate records and make timely reports
- learn and develop.

Yes, I agree No, I don't agree

3. Staff have different responsibilities, but every member of staff has to communicate and deal with information. Staff who are not able to communicate and deal with information effectively cannot work safely and meet quality standards.

Yes, I agree No, I don't agree

4. To communicate and deal with information effectively, staff need:

- communication skills (speaking and listening, reading and writing)
- number skills (e.g. calculations, measurement).

Yes, I agree No, I don't agree

5. There is reliable evidence that all our staff have the communication and number skills that they need to work safely and meet our quality standards.

Yes, I agree No, I don't agree

If you answer 'Yes' to questions 1 to 4, but 'No' to question 5, you may agree that it is worth actively managing the communication and number skills of your staff.

Handout 3

Do we pay enough attention to communication and number skills?

Do we pay enough attention to them in our	Yes	No	?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> recruitment and selection process 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> job documentation (e.g. job descriptions, person specifications etc.) 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> work documentation (e.g. risk assessments, care plans etc.) 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> task design (including how we care for and support the people who use our services)? 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> team working (including our interactions with outside agencies) 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> training (including training methods and materials) 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> performance management (including supervision and appraisals) 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> systems of reporting and record-keeping? 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you think that we do pay enough attention, what's the evidence? In what ways do we?

Do we pay enough attention to communication and number skills for all job roles – or just some job roles, sometimes?

If you think we don't pay enough attention to communication and number skills, why do you think that? What's the evidence? What would you like us to do differently?

Ways an organisation can pay attention to communication and number skills

There are many ways an organisation can pay attention to communication and number skills. Here are some examples.

- Analyse tasks and activities to identify what communication and number skills are involved
- Use task documentation to specify how staff should communicate and deal with information
- Include communication and number skills in person specifications and job descriptions
- Check people's communication and number skills (even if they have good qualifications)
- Solicit feedback from users on the communication skills of staff
- Use supervision to monitor and support the way staff communicate and deal with information
- Use appraisal to review how effectively staff communicate and deal with information
- Offer opportunities for staff to develop their communication and number skills
- Solicit feedback from staff on communication (spoken and written) within the organisation
- Use plain English in all written communication (including application forms)

What other examples, relevant to this organisation, can you add?

What would it be useful for this organisation to do?

Handout 4

What does it mean to take a systematic approach?

When action follows a plan or system, it can be called 'systematic'. In a care organisation, we plan services to ensure that they

- are safe
- meet quality standards
- represent value for money.

The organisation develops processes to help staff deliver services as planned. These processes are supported by training, supervision and documents such as

- task descriptions and standard operating procedures
- written safe systems (to manage risk)
- job descriptions and person specifications
- care plans.

These processes, along with the training, supervision and documents that support them, can also be seen as **systems**.

The objective of these systems is to ensure that the care organisation

- delivers its services as planned
- supports staff in responding correctly to unexpected events.

Discussion points

It is sometimes said that an organisation is only as good as its systems.

How satisfied are you with the systems in this organisation?

To what extent do you think they support staff to communicate and deal with information effectively?

Handout 5

Core employability skills for a health and social care worker

(Skills and attitudes essential to work in adult social care, from Level 1 Award in Preparing to Work in Adult Social Care, QCF unit ref: PWCS 08)

- Write and speak so that others listen and understand
- Read and understand information shown in a variety of ways, including written and spoken English
- Listen and ask questions to understand other people's points of view
- Understand the need to be reliable and dependable
- Give examples of a care worker acting responsibly and being accountable in a care work setting
- Understand the purpose of policies and procedures in a social care workplace
- Demonstrate an ability to assess situations and identify problems and suggest solutions in a social care workplace scenario
- Know how to help 'customers' and deal with their questions and problems
- Demonstrate willingness to work in a team
- Demonstrate an ability to work well with others
- Be open and respond well to simple changes
- Show interest, initiative and effort
- Understand the need to gain skills and knowledge to support and develop your work
- Be willing to learn from mistakes and accept feedback and offer feedback to others in a positive way
- Be willing to reflect on practice and improve
- Be willing to share skills and to provide feedback to others in a positive way
- Be able to use everyday technology such as mobile phones, email applications and basic word processing
- Be able to make estimates and check calculations for accuracy
- Understand how to add, subtract, multiply and divide numbers and give examples of when each should be used in day-to-day social care work
- Observe and record data accurately and legibly