

Effective Written Communication Skills

Foreign & Commonwealth Office

Background

The Professional Skills for Government (PSG) programme is a civil service-wide initiative aimed at enabling all civil service employees to develop the professional skills necessary to carry out their roles more effectively. The FCO's Board is fully committed to implementing PSG across the organisation as a means of not only developing professional skills and motivating staff, but also as a means of fostering longer term organisational improvements.

Effective written communication has been identified as an essential core skill for FCO employees, with all members of staff required to master a level appropriate to their grade and responsibilities. It is in response to this initiative that the FCO engaged Communicaid as its partner for written communication skills courses. Communicaid was selected to work in partnership with the FCO's Learning and Development team to design and deliver a series of writing programmes to roll out across the organisation from support staff through to middle and senior managers.

Training Objectives

The key requirements of the training were to:

- Review and adopt key principles of effective writing and current "best practice" in written communication
- Effectively add value to each employee's written communication
- Reduce the amount of time spent redrafting FCO documents

Challenges

The main challenges were seen as:

- Capturing the interest and imagination of FCO staff at all levels
- Ensuring all existing FCO guidelines for drafting and writing are incorporated into the programmes
- Adapting follow-on coaching sessions to each individual's personal objectives

Training Approach

To ensure the courses were relevant to FCO staff and their roles, authentic FCO documents and samples were used by Communicaid in partnership with the FCO's Learning & Development Team to design the course content.

Pilots were then subsequently scheduled for these programmes which were observed by both Communicaid's Culture and Communication Manager and a member of the FCO's Learning & Development team. These pilot sessions were very fruitful in allowing both Communicaid and the FCO's Learning & Development team to identify areas of enhancement and improvements that could be implemented before general roll out across the organisation took place.

To ensure that a balance was struck between providing a consistent and standardised approach while meeting individual needs, all delegates were required to complete a Training Needs Analysis questionnaire, a pre-course task and submit a sample of unedited work to the trainers to review before attending their sessions.



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Solutions

- Two programmes were commissioned, *Effective Writing* and *Writing with Impact*, to ensure that the programmes suitably accommodated for the different levels of staff expected to attend the sessions
- Two follow-up individual coaching sessions are offered to each delegate to develop their own specific skills. They are expected to work closely with the trainer on authentic business documents to ensure the relevant skills areas are appropriately targeted

Results

- Writing courses at FCO are fully booked each month
- Delegates' confidence and accuracy in written communication has increased, with the results recognised by their line managers
- Repeated redrafting of documents has lessened which has contributed to improved time efficiencies
- The innovative delivery method has proved popular with delegates, reinforcing their development in the context of their daily work

Contact Details

For more information about how Communicaid can assist you and your organisation, please contact our Business Development Team:

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Client Feedback

"I found the Effective Writing course beneficial because it allowed me to learn how to plan my drafting, and how to develop a clear, concise and accurate writing style. Only a few days after the course, my line manager congratulated me on the improvements I had made. I did appreciate the coaching as it was an opportunity to give feedback on how we managed to practise what we learned. Most importantly, I think that I realised that writing is first of all a fantastic means of communication to express ideas and pass information rather than a means to hide oneself behind bureaucracy. Jargon and pompous phrases make the public look at our organisation as boring, old fashioned, over-serious and unattractive. This course is a huge contribution to changing our organisation's image."

Catherine Dohou
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