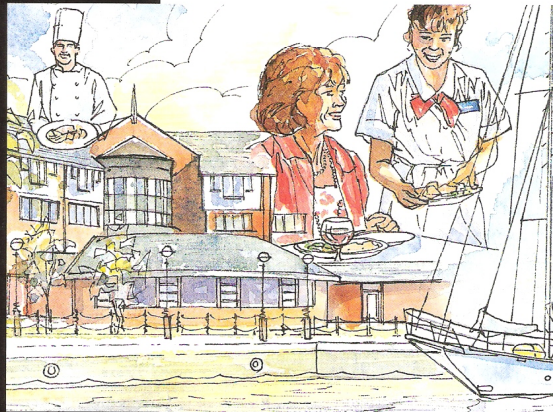


# OPEN LEARNING

*The Copthorne Hotel: An Open Learning Initiative*

## LANGUAGES IN THE FRONTLINE



Salford Quays is one of Manchester's major tourist attractions, offering a wide range of cultural and leisure activities, including a heritage centre, barge wine bar and a performing arts centre and art gallery; soon to house a collection of Lowry's works.

The new four star Copthorne Hotel in the Salford Quays complex has 166 bedrooms and employs 126 staff. The hotel is ideally placed to capitalise

on the many overseas tourists visiting the Quays and also aims to cater for the increasing numbers of business travellers coming to the city.

The Copthorne Hotel created a business plan at the heart of which was the objective of attracting more foreign business travellers. In a typical month, some 350 overseas visitors were using the hotel of which 66 per cent were from European countries such as Germany, France, Belgium, Italy and the Netherlands. Japanese and American visitors were also regularly represented.

The hotel's brochure had already been translated into four languages but the Copthorne's management was determined to take its commitment to catering for overseas guests one stage further. The objective was for every 'frontline' member of staff to speak at least one language other than English.

At the beginning of the initiative only three members of staff were proficient in a foreign language. Hotel management was aware that sales opportunities were being missed because staff were not able to respond effectively to overseas enquiries.



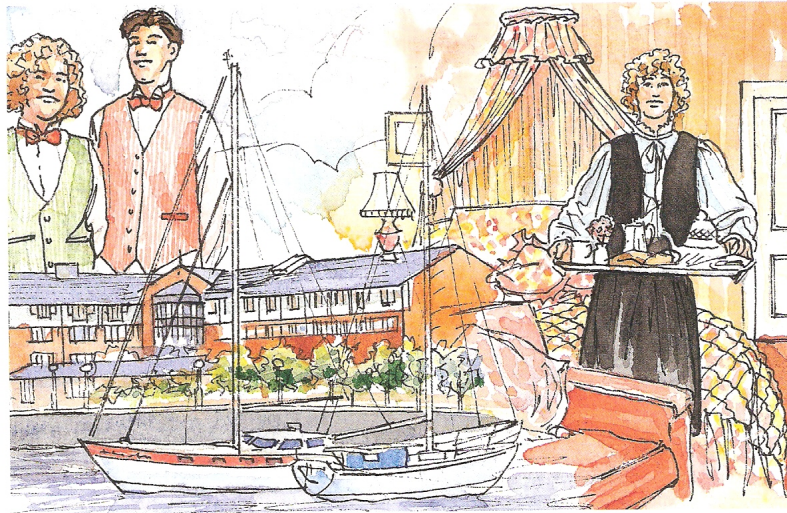
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LEARNING METHODS CASE STUDY



The solution was an Open Learning initiative, using materials devised by the hotel's personnel manager in partnership with staff from the Careers Education Support Programme (CESP) within Salford Local Education Authority.

### **The Training Solution**

After three months of field research two Open Learning packages were created, together with a body of support materials.

The language programme was built around job profiles created by the Copthorne Hotel. Each profile specified a customer contact position (receptionist, porter, waiter, bar tender), the type of skills required for each position and examples of the sorts of guest/staff interaction encountered. A Flexible Learning package was built around each of these scenarios, emphasising the basic language requirements of each.

The packages contained large amounts of self-study material, combined with practical assignments relating to the hotel environment and opportunities for group work. The emphasis of the scheme was on learning about work at the hotel in three core languages, French, German and Spanish. This was combined with a more general personal development component, aiming to expand trainees' understanding of the personal attributes and skills required for each job.

### **The Copthorne Hotel**

The first training pack focused on the skills and tasks involved in frontline jobs in which hotel employees had direct contact with guests. The pack explored the skills and qualities required for each job and the key phrases needed for effective communication.

**Why Bother with Foreign Languages?**

The second pack comprised five modules designed to assist with practical assignments. Game cards contained a range of exercises covering topics such as communications, dealing with holiday-makers and conversing with foreign visitors. Comprehensive tutor notes were supplied with both packs.

**Evaluation of the Pilot Project**

Following the field trials, trainees' reactions were ascertained in an evaluation exercise. The results of this initial research indicated widespread enthusiasm for the project. Language fluency and confidence increased significantly, as did the motivation of trainees involved in the programme. The provision of immediate feedback throughout the initiative was particularly welcomed as it ensured that learning was reinforced and bad habits corrected at an early stage.

Trainees who completed both packs were able to work more independently, with less recourse to supervision. It was also noticeable that participants became more involved with their jobs and sought out learning opportunities of their own accord.

**Results**

For the Copthorne Hotel, the project has been an unqualified success. Links with local educational centres are now well-established. As a result, the hotel is attracting young staff who have an understanding of the importance of foreign language proficiency.

Immediately after completion of the project, two trainees who had been on attachment to the hotel secured full-time jobs with the company. A third has gone on to study catering at a local Further Education College and has been assigned to the Copthorne Hotel for industrial release.

More generally, employees became more confident in their day-to-day dealings with customers and more ambitious about their long-term career prospects, whether in the UK or abroad.

The choice of an Open Learning programme as opposed to a more conventional classroom-based training programme enabled trainees to take control of their own learning and to use their time at work flexibly.

The final challenge for project leaders is to link the programme to existing training or educational qualifications such as NVQs.

**Future Developments**

For the Copthorne Hotel, the benefits of the project are still being felt. Hotel employees other than those in the frontline are being encouraged to develop language skills too.

The hotel's commitment to improving the language proficiency of its entire workforce is such that, increasingly, staff who wish to progress within the organisation will be expected to speak at least one foreign language. It is this commitment which will improve levels of customer service and equip the company to deal with the challenges of operating in an increasingly international market.



O P E N L E A R N I N G

*This Case Study is one of a series of eight covering Open Learning and foreign languages in the hospitality and leisure sector.*