

Interview with Sue Foster, Group head of Learning and Development Royal bank of Scotland (RBS)

Sue Foster is responsible for driving the learning agenda across the group for around 170,000 employees in 53 countries. RBS is currently embedding the ROI Methodology in the planning, improvement and tracking of its learning and development.

‘At Group level, we focus on having the right strategy in place,’ she says. ‘My interest is at the business and organisational level and whether an approach will drive more value. My background is in organisational change and where I find you can really apply the ROI model is where you can articulate the change you want to see in terms of individual and business performance.’

‘I moved into this role 18 months ago. There has always been a great debate about whether you can measure the value of learning. The business invests a great deal in learning and assumes we will get the right results or return on the investment. We have always been able to gather baseline data about volumes etc, but not much on quality and impact.’

‘When I found out about the ROI methodology it instantly caught my attention. I’ve heard many professionals say they have given up trying to track the impact of learning because you just can’t do it. But the thing I like about the ROI model is the way it looks at application and impact, capturing improvement at both an individual and project/programme level which can drive organisational improvement.’

‘You have to be really clear on why you’re investing in learning – is it about personal development or driving improvement in individual and business performance?. In the past line managers have seen it more as personal development for the individual rather than driving performance. Line managers have seen development opportunities, but haven’t asked, *If I put this person through this course, what changes should I see in their performance?*’

Banking, she points out, invests heavily and increasingly in compliance and mandatory training, and for her the vital link is ensuring that you use this to drive value for the customer, employee and the shareholder.

‘People have tended to keep the two separate’, she points out, ‘But we need customers to benefit from better service through the investment in mandatory training, and also for the business to get a return’ and says, ROI can play a significant role.

Sue Foster is enthusiastic about embedding the ROI Methodology, and describes it as being ‘like an enabling technology’.

It has to be embedded into our core learning approach and processes without, as she puts it, ‘making it into an over-engineered bureaucracy’.

Now some six months into embedding ROI into the RBS learning and development operation, she reports real enthusiasm: 'The abdi capability workshops went down really well with our learning professionals who could see how their business colleagues would value the approach. It's logical and easy to get your head round so people really like it. One of our divisional heads went along to introduce the workshop and became so involved they spent the whole day there as it really captured their interest.

'Now we've launched it internally across the business learning teams, we've got an increased level of visibility, and will be making this our single approach to measurement. We're also briefing our suppliers this week so they can implement the approach for all our programmes'

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