

European Reminiscence Network

RYCTT: Remembering Yesterday, Caring Today, Training

Assessment of practice and written assignments for accrediting RYCT apprentices as group facilitators

1. Assessing practice

Our main aim is to inspire and encourage people to set up and lead RYCT groups. The purpose of the training and apprenticeship is to get people going so that they can learn from experience and become really good group leaders. To award an ERN certificate we need to be confident that apprentices have an adequate understanding of the RYCT approach and are able to work effectively through reminiscence with people with dementia and their carers and to reflect on their own practice.

We do not want to give European Reminiscence Network certificates to anyone who we feel is unsuited to leading RYCT groups and might cause harm to group participants. If the supervising group leaders have serious misgivings, it is best to discuss them at an early stage. It's likely that people will drop out if they feel that they are not suited to the work, and are unlikely to get the certificate.

If an apprentice is not up to standard, but is unlikely to do any harm, we can tell them that they need to do additional work before we can award the certificate. If their practice is weak, we can give them plenty of feedback about the areas they need to develop and ask them to work as apprentices at additional sessions. If their written assignment is weak, we can ask them to re-submit the assignment.

By the end of the project, apprentices need to show that they can:

1. Focus on, listen to, retain and reflect back to participants
2. Be welcoming, show warmth and appreciation to participants, help them feel at ease
3. Command the group's attention when working with a small or a large group, by projecting the voice, making eye contact with all participants, spotting people who are 'drifting off' and drawing them back in
4. Respond to what people say, amplify it so everyone hears, and can make connections with one another
5. Promote inclusion (give attention to participants who are quiet and withdrawn)
6. Co-operate well with project team members (supervising leaders, other apprentices, volunteers) in setting up and clearing the room, planning and delivering sessions, de-briefing etc.

7. When leading activities, explain them clearly, make them fun and adapt them to suit the group
8. Facilitate (with others) in activities involving drama, dance, music, drawing etc. even if these are not main strengths
9. Be reflective, accept constructive criticism, show willingness to try new approaches, modify own practice and learn from experience

Supervising leaders will give apprentices feedback throughout their apprenticeship, especially in the debriefing meetings after every session. At the end, they will use the assessment criteria above to assess their overall performance as trainee leaders. We suggest giving general feedback that applies to all apprentices, as well as individual feedback (see samples of both below). In the individual feedback, we need to acknowledge each person’s main strengths, and identify areas which they need to work on.

We do not need to give them numerical marks or grades. However we have devised a marking scheme based on the above assessment criteria to guide assessors and help us to be consistent across the project.

Marking scheme

Listening, engaging, reflecting back	20
Supporting participants in communicating with others	20
Leading small group	10
Leading whole group	10
Facilitating activities and use of creative arts	20
Co-operation with project team	10
Reflection and learning from experience	10
Total	100

Samples of feedback on practice:

Sample of feedback to the whole group:

You have worked well as a group, supporting one another and making sure the group coheres. You have all managed to build strong relationships with people with dementia and their carers, by giving them full attention and appreciation. You have shown that you can be spontaneous and imaginative in the way you respond to and maximise what the participants offer.

Samples of individual feedback:

Apprentice 1: You are a good communicator and listener. You have a great sense of fun and can generate a feeling of adventure and excitement in the participants.

Challenges – You need to work on making your introductions to exercises more accessible, so that they all understand what you are suggesting. Avoid complicated abstract language and give concrete examples to help all participants travel with you.

Apprentice 2: You are a thoughtful and observant group member, highly effective in one-to-one work. You show warmth and understanding when working with individuals. You demonstrate a clear understanding of the dynamics of the group, quick to see what needs to be done and getting on and doing it – extremely valuable qualities, which will always be much appreciated by fellow-facilitators.

Challenge - To find a way that feels comfortable of commanding a large group and inspiring their confidence. The key may be in going slower and using eye contact effectively to ensure that people are listening and absorbing. You need to take time to repeat back what participants say, so that everyone hears it and that they feel their contribution is valued.

2. Assessing the written/oral assignments

Our aim is to enable anyone who shows promise as a group facilitator in their practical work to pass the assignment. However it is important that they are able to show that they understand the RYCT approach, and are able reflect on their experience of it, and talk or write about it clearly. If an assignment is not adequate, apprentices can be given advice on ways to improve it, and be allowed to re-submit.

Assessment criteria for written assignments

The written papers should be no more than 3,000 words long must demonstrate knowledge and understanding of:

1. What is entailed in (a) making the reminiscence activities relevant and enjoyable for group participants (b) good use of the creative arts (about 800 words)

2. The skills that group leaders need, reflecting on their strengths and areas where they need to develop their skills and/or confidence further (about 700 words)
3. How to work with people with dementia so as to support their well-being and maximise what they get from the project (about 800 words)
4. How to work with family carers in a supportive way which helps them to enjoy the sessions and build their confidence and skill (about 700 words).
5. That they can use appropriate evidence (from their own observations of the sessions and/or reading) to back up the points they make
6. That they are able and willing to reflect on their work and learn from their experience

Also, you need to make an overall assessment of each apprentice’s ability to communicate their ideas clearly, and to keep their focus on the areas they have been asked to write about (i.e. what they say is relevant to the task they have been set.)

As with their practice, we need to give trainees qualitative feedback on their assignments, detailing strengths and weaknesses, and avoid giving numerical marks or grades. Again, we have provided a marking scheme to help assessors be consistent across the project.

Marking scheme

Activities and use of creative arts	20
Group leadership skills	20
Working with people who have dementia in RYCT groups	20
Working with carers in RYCT groups	20
Ability to reflect on practice & communicate ideas clearly	20
Total	100

Samples of feedback on written/oral assignment:

General feedback on assignments given to all apprentices

Thank you very much for your written assignments. They were all good and interesting to read. Assessing them in terms of a numerical mark is not in tune with the ethos of the project, and we have not done that. However, they all illustrated your understanding of the RYCT approach, how it can be effective with people with dementia and their carers and what you have learned about your own individual strengths in this work. Well done all of you.

The strongest pieces of work were clearly focused on the RYCT project throughout. They provided clear evidence of their understanding of the four topics:

- The RYCT approach, including integrating creative arts
- The knowledge and skills that group leaders need to develop
- The experiences and needs of people with dementia within the project
- The experiences and needs of carers

Samples of individual feedback:

1. Strengths were your enthusiasm for the work, good observations; comments were firmly rooted in your experiences of the project. You had some very good insights, giving clear evidence of good understanding of the needs and experiences of people with dementia. You made good use of your reading and included good photos as illustration.

Challenges - There was room for improvement in expressing your points more clearly and precisely – sometimes we were not entirely clear what you were trying to say – and in following through on things you refer to, but did not go on to explain. For example, you mention ‘emotionally charged memories’ in the introduction, but don’t really deal with this point.

2. Strengths were that it was very clear and well-expressed – interesting and easy to read - as readers we had no trouble understanding the points you made. It’s nicely laid out, and points were well illustrated with apt examples from your experience of the project. There are good observations and insights, and you are reflective and honest about areas you need to develop as a group leader.

Challenges - There is room for improvement in your knowledge and understanding of the needs and experiences of people with dementia and their carers – something that is essential if you go on to work with this client group. You can do this easily with more experience of working with them, and setting this experience into the context of relevant reading.