

Asset Skills
Activity 2
The impact of employability qualifications
December 2010

THE IMPACT OF EMPLOYABILITY QUALIFICATIONS

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SECTION ONE: BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

"Employability defines the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours required by individuals to seek, obtain and sustain employment at all levels in the labour market." (Skills for Business Network Definition, 2007)

Many definitions of employability have been written, each with a slightly different emphasis but it is generally acknowledged that employability covers a range of transferable skills including literacy, numeracy, problem solving, team working and communication.

This range of skills has been identified by Asset Skills, working with the network of Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and employers, as being imperative for an individual to become "work ready." The required skills are displayed below and together they form the Employability Matrix which is used by Asset Skills and a panel of SSCs as a framework against which to approve all generic employability qualifications.¹

Asset Skills Employability Matrix:

A: Fundamental Skills: The skills needed as a base for further development

- Communication
- Use numbers
- Manage information

B: Personal Management Skills: The personal skills, qualities, attributes, attitudes and behaviours that drive one's potential for growth

- Demonstrate positive attitudes and behaviours
- Be responsible
- Be adaptable
- Learn continuously
- Work safely

C: Teamwork Skills: The skills and attributes needed to contribute effectively

- The working environment
- Work with others
- Think and solve problems
- Participate in projects and tasks

<http://www.assetskills.org/CrossSectorSkills/EmployabilityKeyDocuments.aspx>

¹ See Appendix 1.

1.2 Key Findings

1.2.1 Employability Qualifications

- Small bite-sized chunks of learning mean that learners can gain early accreditation, which encourages commitment to the learning programme.
- Learners and providers alike welcome the flexibility of the qualifications.
- Opportunities for contextualisation enable the learning to be tailored to meet the needs of individual learners.
- Employability qualifications raise aspirations and help to develop a range of so-called ‘soft skills’ such as self-confidence and motivation, which help to improve access to employment opportunities.
- Training Providers and Awarding Organisations maximise opportunities to link the qualifications with real-life activities such as competitions, work placements or charity work, which helps learners to develop skills of value for work and life.
- Strong potential for employability qualifications to be used by employers as a development tool for existing staff, particularly at Level 2 and Level 3.

1.2.2 Employability Matrix

- The Employability Matrix is a core framework for the development of employability qualifications.
- The Employability Matrix is a consistent and transparent framework for the approval of generic employability qualifications.
- The Employability Matrix can be used as a “skills check” tool either by individuals or supported by tutors in a variety of situations such as entry to employment, redeployment or redundancy.
- The Employability Matrix can be used to support a whole organisation approach to embed an understanding of employability skills across all activities and learning programmes.
- The Employability Matrix is a flexible tool, which lends itself to adaptation to make it more “learner friendly”, i.e., a poster or single page to highlight key points
- The Employability Matrix is regularly revised to reflect the needs of employers, which means its content is kept up to date.

SECTION TWO: METHODOLOGY

2.1 Scope

Asset Skills acts as lead organisation for employability for the network of Sector Skills Councils and approves all generic employability qualifications.

In addition to this ongoing role, Asset Skills has been tasked to produce case studies to reflect the impact of generic employability qualifications and these have been brought together in this document.

Asset Skills approached a number of different organisations to gather their views and perspectives with the aim of creating a wide-ranging record of the impact of employability qualifications.

This approach helped to develop a broader picture of the impact of employability qualifications and to gather evidence of the different uses of the Employability Matrix beyond its use as a tool to map and approve generic employability qualifications.

2.2 Aims and Objectives

To date there has been limited research undertaken on the impact of employability qualifications on the learner, training provider, employer or Awarding Organisation. This suite of five case studies aims to fill that gap in information and to start to build up a useful and positive profile of those involved in the qualifications.

Through these case studies Asset Skills aims:

1. To demonstrate the positive impact of employability qualifications have on the groups involved and to support the case to maintain and develop this suite of qualifications.
2. To build a more comprehensive picture of employability provision by gathering the views of training providers, learners, employers and Awarding Organisations. Site visits to training providers meant it was possible to gather their views and also to speak to the individual learners to understand what impact the programmes have on them. The visits to the Awarding Organisations responsible for writing the qualifications gave a better

understanding of the rationale behind the qualifications and also offered a chance to gather their perspectives on the Matrix as a tool to aid the development and approval processes.

3. To investigate and showcase the wider usage of the Asset Skills Employability Matrix² across organisations.
4. To identify key points relating to the development, delivery and take up of generic employability qualifications and use of the Employability Matrix.

2.3 Developing the Case Studies

2.3.1 Identifying participant groups

The case study research was carried out during the last quarter of 2010. It was essential that the case studies reflected the wide range of Awarding Organisations, providers and learners involved in the development, delivery and study of generic employability qualifications. The aim was to investigate as many different viewpoints as possible within the timeframe available:

- **Awarding Organisations** using the Matrix as a framework to write or reaccredit employability qualifications
- **Learners** currently studying employability qualifications or benefiting from their training provider or organisation using the Matrix as an individual skills checker or where a whole organisation approach to employability has been adopted.
- **Training providers** delivering the qualifications to the learners.
- **Employers** employing those who have achieved employability qualifications or undertaken work placements. Unfortunately, this proved to be difficult and direct feedback from only one employer was achieved.

Through this process 15 organisations were contacted although some were unable to participate due to the tight timeframe for the work. The following organisations were identified:

² See Appendix 2.

- ASDAN, Edexcel and National Open College Network (NOCN) – Awarding Organisations
- Rathbone and Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service (WL&FLS) – training providers, giving access to learners and employers

With the participants identified, a consistent process for gathering the required information had to be determined.

2.3.2 Questionnaire development

Questionnaires were devised for Awarding Organisations, learners, training providers and employers. These questionnaires were sent to each participating organisation prior to the interview to give them time to gather data and examples of good practice. The questionnaires also gave structure to the interview, acting as a useful prompt to ensure nothing important was overlooked and providing an opportunity to address wider current and future concerns.

The questions covered different areas depending on the nature of the respondent, but all questionnaires sought to gather views on the employability qualifications in terms of value and usability.

2.3.3 Contacting the participants

Each organisation was briefed on the aims of the exercise and visits arranged.

ASDAN, Edexcel and NOCN – Asset Skills approves all generic employability qualifications and so holds the contact details for the relevant Awarding Organisations. All Awarding Organisations were contacted electronically and invited to be involved. Three out of the eight potential organisations expressed their willingness to be involved in the case studies and to share their perspectives on employability qualifications.

Rathbone – Asset Skills' first contact with Rathbone was at a Foundation Learning event convened by the Departments for Education during summer 2010. Judith Miller, Director for Youth Participation and Learning at Rathbone, agreed to meet to explore future collaborative working. A subsequent site visit was arranged at one of Rathbone's largest centres in Derby to provide access to the tutors and learners taking employability qualifications.

The Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service – this organisation was identified through the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) report: “Becoming work ready – A practical guide to developing employability provision.”³ The report showcased the centre as one which had embedded employability across all their programmes.

2.3.4 Face to face interviews

Face to face recorded interviews were deemed to be the best method for gathering feedback from the organisations as it would reduce dependence on written notes and encourage more interaction between the interviewer and interviewee.

At this stage, all participants were asked to complete a consent form agreeing to take part and to express their willingness for photos and quotations to be used by Asset Skills for publication.

2.3.5 Supporting documentation

The appendices contain copies of the following materials:

- Blank questionnaires sent to all participants⁴
- Completed questionnaires with additional audio material gathered via the interview. The additional information gathered at the interview is indicated in italic text.⁵

In addition, further materials were supplied by some organisations during the site visits and these have been included in Appendix 6 – Supporting Material to provide background information on their activities.

2.3.6 Post-interview

Following each interview, the recorded sessions were transcribed and analysed to identify the key points to be included in the case studies. Information from the written responses and additional materials supplied by the participants was also reviewed to form the basis of the case studies.

³ <http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=279896%20>.

⁴ See Appendix 3.

⁵ See Appendix 4.

On completion, the individual draft case studies were sent to each organisation for feedback and approval prior to publication.

2.3.7 List of case studies

The case study research was carried out during the last quarter of 2010 and the table below lists the organisations involved and the focus of the case study.

| Organisation | Focus |
|--|--|
| ASDAN | Awarding Organisation perspective on employability qualifications and the mapping process to the Matrix. |
| Edexcel | Awarding Organisation perspective on employability qualifications and the mapping process to the Matrix. |
| NOCN | Awarding Organisation perspective on employability qualifications and the mapping process to the Matrix. |
| Rathbone | Training provider perspective on delivering the employability qualifications to young people |
| Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service (WL&FLS) | Training provider perspective delivering adult and family learning |

2.3.8 Acknowledgements

Asset Skills would like to thank all the organisations involved for their co-operation and contribution to the development of the case studies. The opportunity to visit the organisations proved beneficial in providing a valuable insight to their operations. Asset Skills would also like to thank the Learning and Skills Network (LSN) and the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) for providing useful provider contact lead via its recent report, 'Becoming Work Ready – A practical guide to developing employability skills provision.'⁶

⁶ <http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=279896%20>.

SECTION THREE: PERSPECTIVES ON EMPLOYABILITY

3.1 Thematic Review

A number of common themes have been drawn from across the case studies:

- The flexible approach
- Bite-sized learning
- Unaccredited 'soft skills'
- The future of employability

3.1.1 The flexible approach

All of the organisations interviewed expressed their support for the flexible nature of the qualifications. This flexibility allows learners to select their units and pathways, for deliverers to deliver the qualifications in a creative and imaginative way and Awarding Organisations to develop qualifications that are well-received by learners and providers alike.

Employability qualifications offer unit flexibility that allows training providers to select the relevant pathways to suit their learner's needs. This personalised approach to learning is effective in engaging those who have previously found the learning process inaccessible and unappealing. The development of an individual learning plan ensures learners are not repeating skills they have already gained and instead are focusing on new skills to aide their career progression. The units are accredited through a portfolio-based assessment which all organisations interviewed cited as being important criteria in focusing the learner on their study and taking ownership of the learning.

"There are no examinations in the qualification, which works best with this cohort of learners. We introduce the portfolio at induction and they have to cross reference it to the standards and we counter check it ... We encourage them to take ownership and to keep their files up to date. By following this process they understand what they have learnt and the qualification a bit more."

Lead Tutor, Rathbone Derby

Several organisations agreed the need for an active and creative delivery of the qualifications and this is demonstrated through several examples of teaching outside of “normal” classroom activities.

Edexcel works with partners to accredit its WorkSkills qualifications across various modes of delivery. For example, they work with Coca-Cola Enterprises on the ‘*Real Business Challenge*’⁷: a competition designed to capture an individual’s ability to experience the business world and to develop their employability skills through group work and problem solving activities. Similarly, ‘*The Chocolate Challenge*’,⁸ at Whickham School in Gateshead, requires learners to earn credits towards their WorkSkills qualification by working in a team and creating a business plan. Learners at Sir John Cass Foundation Red Coat School and the Tower Hamlets Education and Business Partnership, have also achieved credits towards their qualifications by participating in an enterprise day to design a charity T-shirt at a one-day workshop.⁹

Staff at the Rathbone centre in Derby also welcome the flexible curriculum and see it as an opportunity to turn the learning into real life scenarios. The tutors encourage learners to think about situations around them and how they could be linked to the employability qualification they are studying. Using the City and Guilds Awards and Certificates in Employability and Personal and Social Development, tutors use the ‘Community Action’ and ‘Community Project’ units as a basis for a programme of learning that takes the learners out of the classroom environment and into the community. Learners have been involved in planting gardens at local schools, making jewellery to raise money for charity and organising a Macmillan coffee morning dressed as mugs to raise money for those affected by cancer.

“They went to a school where they did the garden and replanted stuff. They went and they loved it. I asked them why they liked it. They replied: ‘Well, I didn’t know how to garden before, we worked in a team, we found how important it is that everyone does their own job as we all had accountability, we found out how frustrating it is if somebody slacked off’. It gave them the skills to think about how their actions affect others within the working environment; it got them to think about it in a different way... It’s something to make them more motivated.”

Lead Tutor, Rathbone Derby

⁷ See Appendix 6.

⁸ See Appendix 6.

⁹ See Appendix 6.

The Wirral Lifelong & Family Learning Service (WL&FLS) has been involved with The Wirral Jobs Programme, which aims to give learners the skills needed to progress into sustainable employment. The programme involved learners in team building exercises and role plays on away days which, alongside classroom based learning, aimed to support learners to develop the right skills to secure employment. The four-week programme (two days learning, one day job club) and work placement succeeded in equipping them with the social skills and confidence they needed to progress into work.

All organisations involved in the case studies recognised the merit in taking a flexible approach to employability qualifications and developing employability skills through other 'real life' activities.

3.1.2 Bite-sized learning

This approach to learning allows the learner to gain accreditation by taking small, bite-sized chunks of learning, making it both accessible and attractive.

“Everyone agrees that these bite-sized chunks work across all levels of ability. You have a start and a finish and then you move on. WorkSkills has certainly been the qualification suite we have had the most positive feedback on.”

Edexcel case study, 2010

Regional Open College Networks (OCNs) have been externally validating courses using a credit-based system for over 25 years, with a particular focus on provision for learners traditionally under-represented in learning and training.¹⁰ NOCN recognised early on that this form of accreditation raised levels of motivation and supported progression among learners. Working with the 'network' of OCNs, the NOCN ethos is to contribute towards the creation of a more flexible, inclusive and 'compositional' credit framework that is responsive to the needs of employers and communities.

As a centre for adult learning, WL&FLS embrace the bite-sized approach to learning, fully recognising that the learning delivered needs to be different to that experienced at school. This is achieved through creating a small, friendly environment and

¹⁰ Celebrating Achievement – 25 Years of Open College Networks - <http://www.nocn.org.uk/about-us/a-brief-history>.

ensuring the lessons are delivered imaginatively. Through selecting this delivery method, they see noticeable differences in the learners who arrive and leave the centre. For WL&FLS the important change in the learner is through their development of 'soft skills' and this is the reason for why employability is embedded within their service delivery plan.

3.1.3 Unaccredited 'soft skills'

The WL&FLS sees their learning programmes as equipping individuals with the skills they need to progress in work and life, and often hears that the skills have been put to good use to help children with their homework. Through imaginative delivery, learners are taught skills in literacy, numeracy and employability. Staff at the centre identified the main benefit to the learner attending the courses as being increased confidence. In turn, this leads to self belief, better self-esteem and the raising of their aspirations to succeed for themselves and their children.

"The big difference for the learners is in the things we don't assess in a formal way. The self-confidence, self-esteem, we don't assess that in a formal way as we can't. We know anecdotally by looking at them ... What's important from an employability view is that these people learn to communicate with other people and get to develop a bit, using their new-found confidence to go out and learn new things. ..Surely that's what employability is all about? It's not about getting the piece of paper to say I can do this, that or the other, it's about saying I'm ready to work now whereas before I wasn't. That's what our job is and that's where the satisfaction comes. If I've done that in 15 weeks then that's our job done." Tutor, WL&FLS

Once the individual has the willingness and confidence to progress further, their options are expanded and they can set about finding a job (paid or voluntary), progress to a higher level qualification or choose a vocational pathway they may have otherwise have thought was out of reach.

Raising aspirations is a central theme of the ASDAN case study, 'On the right track'¹¹, which involved two local schools and the Locomotion National Railway Museum in County Durham. The partners worked together to offer extended work placements accredited by ASDAN's employability qualifications and the difference in the students attending the course was remarked upon by the staff there.

¹¹ See Appendix 6.

“.. the Employability qualification laid the foundations for lifelong learning and gave young people a sense of pride and achievement. As the principal tutor, I see a change in the students’ attitude towards learning. The shy, ‘can’t be bothered’, ‘I’m not worth it’ students gain confidence, take the bull by the horns and dive into their studies with great enthusiasm ... If we as facilitators can help these young people to realise that they have self-worth in our society of today, we can hold our hands up and honestly say that we are providing a worthwhile programme.”

Education Officer, Locomotion National Railway Museum, County Durham

In an attempt to ensure learners do not lose their new found motivation and confidence, Rathbone certifies its learners units as they are achieved throughout the qualification or programme. This short term accreditation not only motivates the learners to continue with their journey but also encourages others in the centre to take part. A satisfied learner from the centre is quoted below:

“I’m really happy now. I’m glad I came here because if I were somewhere else I wouldn’t have achieved as much as I have here. I’d definitely recommend others to come here...it is a great sense of achievement. I am only 17 but have been able to get out there and work at a young age so it’s benefiting me. When I come back I’m going to give everyone presents, when I’m a millionaire!”

Learner, Rathbone Derby

3.1.4 The future of employability

All organisations interviewed expressed their support for generic employability qualifications, either as a stand-alone qualification or as part of a wider learning programme.

Both Rathbone and WL&FLS spoke warmly of a number of individual cases where learners had progressed and as a result had raised their aspirations. The two organisations concurred that the positive impact of learners achieving accreditation cannot be underestimated in terms of encouraging progression into further learning or employment.

The three Awarding Organisations are keen for employability provision to continue. Collectively, Awarding Organisations identified a number reasons why the qualifications should continue including: the belief that as unemployment increases amongst the low skilled this could lead to a need to increase provision that focuses

on, or incorporates, elements of employability provision; the fact that organisations such as the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and others continue to produce surveys that which state employers continue to lament the lack of employability skills among their recruits.

One Awarding Organisation also wanted to see employability skills included in the 14-19 Curriculum to ensure young people leave school and progress to further learning or employment with an understanding of the skills required in the workplace. The same organisation would also welcome a wider appreciation of the value of a formal approach to developing employability skills in employment.

3.2 Organisational Perspectives

3.2.1 Awarding Organisations

Awarding Organisations¹² reported that there are some 93,292 learners registered for employability qualifications. Most anticipate that this number will grow over the next few years reflecting the increased take up by schools and other organisations.

Some of this increased take up could potentially come from employers. Some Awarding Organisations report that they are already working with a number of employers, for example, Edexcel's WorkSkills qualification has been chosen by McDonalds to support its work placement scheme.

ASDAN is also working with employers to pilot use of its employability qualification both with its own customer service team and also with another large, London-based organisation, as a staff development tool.

The Awarding Organisations, who participated in this exercise, were happy with the Employability Matrix as a framework for the development and accreditation of employability qualifications:

"... the statements in the Matrix provide a useful standard against which Awarding Organisations should develop units with coherent sets of learning outcomes and assessment criteria for use in an employability qualification."

NOCN, 2010

¹² Based on data supplied covering period to end August 2010 and included in a Report from Asset Skills: "Analysis of Employability Qualifications Data", December 2010.

Some Awarding Organisations also note that the Matrix is laborious to use, especially if working with a qualification containing a large number of units or reviewing qualifications at a number of levels.

Some improvements were suggested:

- potential to weight some of the statements to reflect their relative importance
- review some of the statements to confirm that they reflect employers' needs
- review the format of the Employability Matrix and consider presenting the information on one page to facilitate usability

A revision of the Employability Matrix is underway, with Version 4 due for release in summer 2011, and these comments will be taken into consideration.

3.2.2 Training providers

The training providers who participated in this case study survey both recognised the value of a creative approach to learning.

For example, the digital photography course offered by WL&FLS encompassed aspects of the employability curriculum with a focus on numeracy and literacy skills in particular and included mini-projects that required team working and project management skills. Learners are thus given a chance to learn a number of skills at the same time with each session rounded off with a reflection session using the poster¹³ as a tool to “check off” what skills have been covered.

At Rathbone's Derby centre, the employability curriculum was embedded into some of the vocational programmes such as carpentry and retail. This approach helps to keep the learning fresh and pertinent to the learner and gives them skills they can apply in a real life workplace.

Work placements are a feature of Rathbone's employability provision, with all learners securing placements with local employers and charities:

¹³ See Appendix 6.

“Kieran Mullin Training (KMT) works successfully with Rathbone to deliver our Foundation Learning course in Hairdressing and Barbering. This facilitates not only personal development for the learner but, in many cases, progression onto our Apprenticeship programme.”

Kieran Mullin Training

3.2.3 Learners

The learners interviewed throughout these studies had extremely positive views on the training they had experienced.

At WL&FLS learners spoke of the friendly working environment and their future plans. One learner described how the working environment was, “more relaxed here, people don’t look down on you. I wouldn’t have stayed if it wasn’t a good working environment.”¹⁴

Another attended the centre to get her qualifications and move forwards in life. She completed her maths and ASDAN Level 1 Certificate in Employability in six months and had since been offered a permanent job in childcare. Speaking of the employability qualification she said:

“The employability qualification gave me a lot of confidence because I enjoyed doing all the group projects on the computer and before that I used to try and do everything on my own, I wasn’t too good with doing things with other people but now I’ve built up my confidence at being part of a group and interview techniques and application forms. I’d highly recommend an employability qualification to others. I enjoyed every minute of it.” Learner, WL&FLS

At Rathbone many learners are signposted by Connexions but a large number are also word of mouth recommendations from other students at the centre. All learners spoke very highly of the learning atmosphere and training provided to them.

“...this is the place to be, there are other places I’ve been and they don’t understand, it’s like they don’t want to help you. Other training providers don’t help you as much as they do here. Here they push you and say, ‘come on you can do it’. They motivate you. It’s really good here to be, honest.”

Learner, Rathbone, Derby

¹⁴ Full case study available in Section Four.

Another learner acknowledged that the programmes provided a “good grounding for moving on”.

WL&FLS has taken a whole organisation approach to employability and embedded it across its entire delivery programme. All staff have undergone awareness training to help them understand that there is more to employability skills than CV writing and job search.

The content of the Employability Matrix has been distilled into a simple A4 poster¹⁵ and used by tutors as a visual checklist and prompt for learning. They found the Matrix to be a “brilliant” tool that could be used in a number of ways with learners, tutors and to support those in employment.

The one complaint WL&FLS had about the Matrix was that the language was not easily accessible to their students, but they had overcome this by producing the simple A4 poster, which highlights the main skills.

3.2.4 Offender learning

The Offenders’ Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) operates across England but is not a ‘Service’ in the same sense as the Ambulance Service or the Fire and Rescue Service. Rather it is a means by which existing delivery services are brigaded together and focused on to the particular needs of a specific group of learners.

The vision for OLASS¹⁶ is:

"That offenders, in prisons and supervised in the community, according to need, should have access to learning and skills, which enables them to gain the skills and qualifications they need to hold down a job and have a positive role in society".

OLASS delivery arrangements are inspected by Ofsted, alongside the Prison and Probation Inspectorates, to exactly the same standards as all other post-16 learning.

¹⁵ See Appendix 6.

¹⁶ <http://olass.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/>.

The new OLASS core curriculum aims to contribute to a reduction in-re-offending by improving offenders' employment prospects on release through a focus on employment and skills. Intrinsic to the development of employability skills are Functional Skills, including English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and accredited qualifications. The aim is to use training for employment to reduce re-offending and to promote social cohesion.

OLASS uses the Employability Matrix as a skills checklist tool,¹⁷ working with offenders to identify those skills, which require further development. At least one prison has developed an Employability Strategy¹⁸ based around the content of the Employability Matrix and aimed at taking a whole organisation approach to employability skills development across the prison.

Offender learning needs to be adaptable and flexible within prisons. Regular attendance can prove to be a barrier with prisoners being moved to another prison where the qualification they have started may not be available. Consequently, short modular programmes accrediting incrementally are attractive to both the learner and the staff delivering qualifications.

The prison learning programme includes qualifications from a number of Awarding Organisations such as, Edexcel's WorkSkills qualification¹⁹ and the suite of employability qualifications from ASDAN.

They were able to achieve the outcomes in stages and claim OCN credit on completion of individual units. The OCN credit awards were tangible and transferable. They could be carried forward and accumulated towards full NOCN qualifications...learners moving from one establishment to another could be tracked and their achievement records maintained.

Celebrating achievement – 25 Years of Open College Networks, page 29

¹⁷ See Appendix 5.

¹⁸ Employability Strategy, HMP Brixton,
http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/media/Skills%20for%20Life%20Starter%20Toolkits/4.4_HMPBrixton_Employability_policy.pdf .

¹⁹ WorkSkills for Offenders, Edexcel,
http://www.edexcel.com/quals/workskills/Documents/Gary_profile.pdf .

Some prisons have adopted NOCN's bite-sized approach for their offender learning provision and several prisons throughout England now offer the Qualification in Progression.

The Skillstrain project ran for two years from February 2006, funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in partnership with OCN London Region (OCNLR). The benefits of the project to the learner were highlighted in their final report in March 2009²⁰.

The project aimed to certificate existing unaccredited learning and training (vocational and generic) within prisons using the NOCN credit-based qualifications. The lack of formal certification had meant offenders were unable to evidence their skills to potential employers upon release. The hope was that by accrediting work the offenders were already carrying out on a daily basis, this formal recognition would help to encourage further progression and employment, and contribute towards reducing re-offending.

The benefits of Skillstrain to learners...are widely acknowledged as being broader than anticipated when the project first began. These additional benefits include increased motivation, confidence and aspirations. Evaluations have provided evidence of beneficiaries planning for future employment and showing a desire to improve their own lives and those of their families.

Skillstrain Transition Project, Final report, March 2009, page 10

²⁰ See Appendix 6.

SECTION FOUR: CASE STUDIES

4.1 Overview

The case studies explore the impact employability qualifications have on the learner, how training providers find delivering the qualifications and also how Awarding Organisations find the mapping process to the Employability Matrix.

The case studies also highlight examples of the Matrix being used by organisations and individuals as a skills checker to recognise the skills already held and to identify those that require further improvement.

The following table lists those organisations that participated in the case study survey, and includes three Awarding Organisations and two training providers.

| Organisation | Focus |
|--|--|
| ASDAN | Awarding Organisation perspective on employability qualifications and the mapping process to the Matrix. |
| Edexcel | Awarding Organisation perspective on employability qualifications and the mapping process to the Matrix. |
| NOCN | Awarding Organisation perspective on employability qualifications and the mapping process to the Matrix. |
| Rathbone | Training provider perspective on delivering the employability qualifications to young people. |
| Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service (WL&FLS) | Training provider perspective delivering adult and family learning. |

The Awarding Organisations each have a portfolio of generic employability qualifications, which are made available to a wide group of young and adult learners in a number of settings.

The Training Providers, although with a similar offer, attract quite different cohorts of learners. WL&FLS works mostly with adults who have been referred via Jobcentre Plus, whereas Rathbone works mainly with young people who have been referred through Connexions or via recommendations from other learners.

4.2 ASDAN: Generic employability qualification pioneers



ASDAN is a charitable social enterprise with awarding body status, providing qualifications and programmes to more than 6,000 UK and international schools, colleges, youth centres and training providers. ASDAN's qualifications and programmes offer flexible ways to accredit skills for learning, skills for employment and skills for life.

ASDAN originated in the 1980s through a small group of teachers and trainers in Bristol and has since expanded to 100 staff, located in its head office in Bristol and five regional teams across the UK.

ASDAN is established as a registered charity for *“The advancement of education, by providing opportunities for all learners to develop their personal and social attributes and levels of achievement through ASDAN awards and resources, and the relief of poverty, where poverty inhibits such opportunities for learners.”*

http://www.asdan.org.uk/About_ASDAN/Vision_and_Values

The generic employability approach

ASDAN's generic employability qualifications have been in circulation for many years. ASDAN prides itself on the generic content of its qualifications and maintains consistency by using the same core units throughout its entire suite of qualifications. These essential generic skills provide the backbone to what ASDAN is trying to achieve: employability skills for all learners taking the qualifications.

ASDAN's unique approach to qualification development means that providers and learners have a vast array of generic employability and personal and social development qualifications and units to choose from. Their distinctive generic qualifications offer limited vocational specialisms. However, in the longer term, ASDAN does not rule out the possibility of developing vocational pathways as a way of extending the coverage of the qualification and widening its offer to providers.

ASDAN offers ten Asset Skills' approved employability qualifications ranging from Entry Level 2 through to Level 3 and, since 2008, has had nearly 20,000 registrations from educational providers. In September 2010 it updated its employability suite in response to feedback from users, with the new suite including additional pathways and units. It is closely monitoring the progress of these qualifications to assess the success of the new options.

ASDAN believes the appeal of its qualifications lies in the range of levels and units available to meet different learners' needs and the solid platform of skills it develops, which helps learners to progress into further learning or the workplace. The ASDAN qualifications lend themselves to a creative approach to delivery, which allows for providers to deliver a customised programme by selecting the most appropriate units and pathways for their learners.

Support to the learning provider

ASDAN offers a variety of support to their centres: mandatory training; a new updated website containing a wide range of downloadable support materials; support meetings two to three times a year in each region and a programme advisor service available Monday to Friday.

ASDAN anticipates there to be an increase in the number of school-based learners and, in preparation, is currently producing workbooks that will be optional within the registration fee. These workbooks will support learning at each level of its employability qualifications and have been developed in response to requests from centres to provide a curriculum to follow with the learners. The new student books contain informative resource sheets with a range of suggested activities linked to the assessment criteria. These optional workbooks, combined with the additional qualification pathways, will make it easier for schools to offer this suite of qualifications.

Communicating with providers

As part of its comprehensive offer to its centres, ASDAN produces a bi-annual bulletin to share good practice and keep centres updated on changes within the organisation and across educational policy.

Employability case studies feature in each issue of the bulletin. The following examples show how ASDAN employability qualifications have been used in a number of settings.

1. **'On the right track'**²¹

The Locomotion National Railway Museum in County Durham worked with local schools to offer extended work placements accredited by ASDAN's employability qualifications. Learners attended the museum for 35 weeks to gain an insight into the world of work.

".. the Employability qualification laid the foundations for lifelong learning and gave young people a sense of pride and achievement. As the principal tutor, I see a change in the students' attitude towards learning. The shy, 'can't be bothered', 'I'm not worth it' students gain confidence, take the bull by the horns and dive into their studies with great enthusiasm ... If we as facilitators can help these young people to realise that they have self-worth in our society of today, we can hold our hands up and honestly say that we are providing a worthwhile programme."

Education Officer, Locomotion National Railway Museum, County Durham

2. **'Ready for Action'**²²

This is an example of individuals preparing for a career in the military whilst working towards an ASDAN qualification. MPC North trains 16-18 year olds for full-time Army status and optimum physical fitness to prepare them for a career in the military. The individuals involved showcased their skills in communication, presentation and interview situations whilst on the programme which have all been accredited towards their ASDAN qualification. The programme is an example of where individuals have been encouraged to push themselves and realise they have the skills within them to achieve and progress in their careers.

Employability Skills Programme

The ASDAN Employability Skills Award was selected as the qualification to support a joint initiative from Jobcentre Plus (JCP) and Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and

²¹ See Appendix 6.

²² See Appendix 6.

Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills. The Employability Skills Programme (ESP) is designed to support JCP customers to improve their literacy, numeracy and employability skills and is funded until March 2011. There has been high demand for the programme, which has proved helpful in supporting adults back into sustainable employment. This work provided an opportunity to support the development of an assessment resource tool that measured learner's attitudes, qualities and behaviours associated with generic employability situations. The work has been recognised by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) and featured in the publication: "Employability: Incentivising Improvement."²³

Future of employability skills

ASDAN would like to see a wider appreciation of the value of a formal approach to developing employability skills amongst employers, prisons, training providers and Educational Business Partnerships (EBPs).

With employability skills being such a political hot topic, it would like to see the inclusion of employability qualifications as part of the 14-19 Curriculum.

ASDAN tastes its own medicine

Keen to promote the notion of employability qualifications having relevance in the workplace, ASDAN is currently piloting the delivery of their Level 2 Employability Skills qualifications with its own customer service team. It is still early days for the project, but feedback to date has been positive and a successful outcome will support ASDAN's plans to encourage more employers to see the value in employability qualifications as a development tool for staff.

Although currently there is relatively low take up of Level 3 employability qualifications, ASDAN sees a potential future market for this level of qualification for those in work or graduates equipping themselves with the skills required to be successful in gaining employment. In addition to its internal project, it is currently working with a London-based employer to explore this opportunity.

Contact: For more information on ASDAN or the qualifications it offers visit: www.asdan.org.uk

²³ Employability: Incentivising Improvement, UK Commission for Employment and Skills, June 2010.

4.3 Edexcel: Accredited learning through a personalised approach



Edexcel was formed in 1996 by the merger of the Business & Technology Education Council (BTEC), the country's leading provider of vocational qualifications, and the University of London Examinations & Assessment Council (ULEAC), one of the major examination boards for GCSEs and A levels.

Edexcel is part of the Pearson company and is the UK's largest awarding body offering academic and vocational qualifications and testing to schools, colleges, employers and other places of learning in the UK and internationally.

The organisation is formed of seven UK and several international offices and they have a team of four working on employability qualifications.

The personalised approach

Edexcel adopts a personalised approach to its qualifications. Edexcel's driving theme is the individual and their journey through education or employment. The generic employability qualifications offered are aimed at enhancing employability skills, i.e., the "soft skills" in demand by employers and to encourage career progression.

"Personalisation, taking people on from where they have already got to is one of our driving themes in what we call, 'My Skills' so the skills are run by the learner and no one else." Edexcel case study, 2010

With this personalised approach at the forefront, Edexcel is considering developing diagnostic tools for use by centres and learners to identify skills gaps to create a unique 'bespoke' programme for the learner. It is believed that in doing so, the individual will focus on the skills missing rather than the skills already evidenced and that this will progress the individual quicker and avoid duplication.

"Our long term vision is that everything becomes more personalised to the learner so we can push them on their journey." Edexcel case study, 2010

The qualifications

Edexcel offers 16 Asset Skills approved employability qualifications in total which, since 2008, have attracted over 154,000 registrations.²⁴ The majority of these registrations are derived from its WorkSkills suite²⁵, which comprises some 108 units giving the learner a great degree of flexibility.

The qualifications are offered from Entry 3 through to Level 3 and are designed for those wishing to progress in the workplace, education and training. The WorkSkills framework is designed to offer maximum flexibility, which benefits both the individual taking the qualification and the deliverer. The qualification is seen to be particularly relevant as it equips the individual with the wide ranging work-related skills essential in the current changing working landscape.

For Edexcel, the success of the qualification lies in its facility to offer small, bite-sized chunks to the learner, making it accessible and attractive.

“Everyone agrees that these bite-sized chunks work across all levels of ability. You have a start and a finish and then you move on. It has certainly been the qualification suite we have had the most positive feedback on.”

Edexcel case study, 2010

Flexible and creative delivery

As part of Edexcel’s vision, educational providers are encouraged to take an active approach to delivery. This flexible approach has allowed several providers to adapt the qualification to suit its learners’ needs and to be imaginative in its delivery to gain accreditation. This has been demonstrated through several activities and work programmes:

1. Competitions

In this case, an engaging activity encouraging the use of communication and team skills can lead to an individual achieving an accredited qualification. Using the WorkSkills ‘Working in a Team’ unit, this challenge, run by Coca Cola Enterprises

²⁴ Based on data supplied covering the period to end October 2010, See Appendix 4.

²⁵ See Appendix 6.

aims to involve over 50, 000 individuals. The ‘*Real Business Challenge*²⁶’ gives individuals insight into the business world and develops their employability skills through interactive group work and problem solving activities. The Challenge consists of three rounds giving individuals the chance to gain a WorkSkills employability qualification at Award level.

2. Work-related learning at school

Another example of creative delivery through WorkSkills qualifications is demonstrated by Whickham School in Gateshead. To earn credits towards their WorkSkills qualification, learners took part in the ‘*Chocolate Challenge*²⁷,’ which required them to create a business plan for an idea involving chocolate. The Challenge required the application of skills in maths, communication, team working, planning and reviewing and it also tested their ability to present the information as a group in an informative and coherent way. ‘*The Chocolate Challenge*’ is an example of where imaginative delivery has been adopted and also where accreditation for an employability qualification was achieved through an active environment outside of “normal” classroom conditions.

3. Enterprise days

Learners achieved units towards a WorkSkills qualification working with the Sir John Cass Foundation, Red Coat School and the Tower Hamlets Education and Business Partnership (EBP). Together these organisations led an enterprise day which saw individuals attending a one-day workshop to design a charity T-shirt. In addition to producing the T-shirt, the groups also had to produce a business plan and a sales and marketing strategy.

Individual progression

A noted strength of the WorkSkills suite is the increased confidence it instils in the individuals taking the qualification. The qualification encourages the individual by recognising achievement along the way and providing the self-belief they need to progress.

²⁶ See Appendix 6.

²⁷ See Appendix 6.

“The WorkSkills units offer a positive focus on what the learners can do rather than what they cannot or will not do. The school identified that the evidence required to complete the learning outcomes for these units was naturally occurring within the current timetable and did not involve typical academic study.”

Whickham School, Gateshead

Several of Edexcel’s Champion Schools report a noticeable and marked difference in the effort of individuals taking WorkSkills programmes who had previously become disengaged with learning. Several Celebration of Success events are planned for spring 2011 to recognise these achievements and centres are being asked to nominate individuals who have shown the greatest turnaround.

The qualifications provide the individual with the soft skills employers are looking for such as: adaptability; a positive can-do attitude and a willingness to continue learning throughout their working lives.

Employer support

The Edexcel WorkSkills qualifications are supported by several large employers who see the value in the generic skills being taught.

McDonalds has chosen the WorkSkills qualifications to underpin its work placement scheme. This was achieved by mapping its personalised work placement student workbooks to the Level 1 and 2 BTEC Certificate in WorkSkills.

The work of Coca-Cola in relation to WorkSkills has already been covered earlier in this case study, and there are a number of other organisations who use the qualification to support their activities, including: Compass, Tesco, HSBC, Nomura Bank, Solent EBP, Durham EBP and the Enterprise Forum.

For more information on Edexcel and employability qualifications including the WorkSkills programme visit: www.edexcel.com

4.4 National Open College Network: Flexible, bite size learning



The National Open College Network (NOCN) is a leading UK awarding organisation, offering high quality, flexible, credit-based qualifications and is accredited by the Regulatory Authorities in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

NOCN offers its qualifications under licence via ten regional Open College Networks (OCNs) throughout England and Northern Ireland and works in partnership with Agored Cymru in Wales.

A unitised approach

NOCN offers a choice of 16 Asset Skills approved employability qualifications to their centres.

Regional OCNs have been externally validating courses using a credit-based system for over 25 years, with a particular focus on provision for learners traditionally under-represented in learning and training.²⁸ The OCNs adopted what is now the agreed QCF template for unitised accreditation in 1994 and all NOCN qualifications approved since then have been written in this format. NOCN recognised early on that this form of accreditation raised levels of motivation and supported progression among learners. Working with the 'network' of OCNs, the NOCN ethos is to contribute towards the creation of a more flexible, inclusive and 'compositional' credit framework that is responsive to the needs of employers and communities.

Some of the initial ambitions of those involved in the setting up the first OCN's and then NOCN 20 years ago may yet to be realised within the new Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF).

Peter Wilson, Adults Learning, November 2006, page 9, Celebrating Achievement

²⁸ Celebrating Achievement – 25 Years of Open College Networks - <http://www.nocn.org.uk/about-us/a-brief-history>.

It is with this unitised approach in mind that NOCN has developed its employability qualifications. Learners have the flexibility to choose from a range of units appropriate to their needs and are able to gain accreditation through portfolio-based assessment. The breadth of the qualification prepares learners for the world of work and equips them with the generic skills required to gain and sustain employment. NOCN believes that gaining an employability qualification provides the individual with tangible evidence of their work-readiness which they can then show to potential employers. The qualifications can be taught as stand-alone or as an add-on to vocational courses and qualifications, which allows the option for embedding the employability skills into vocational delivery and assessment but still recognising the achievements through a separate employability qualification.

As well as being flexible for the learner, the qualifications allow practitioners the freedom to develop their curriculum around the units. NOCN considers this to be imperative as it means the qualifications can be delivered in a wide range of learning contexts. This flexible delivery within varied learning environments has meant that NOCN's employability qualifications, in particular its Qualifications in Progression, have been picked up in offender learning contexts and are delivered in a number of prisons and probation services across England.

NOCN employability qualifications in offender learning

Offender learning needs to be adaptable and flexible within prisons. Regular attendance can prove to be a barrier especially as prisoners can be moved to another prison where the qualification they have started may not be available. Consequently, short modular programmes accrediting incrementally are attractive to both the learner and the staff delivering the qualifications.

They were able to achieve the outcomes in stages and claim OCN credit on completion of individual units. The OCN credit awards were tangible and transferable. They could be carried forward and accumulated towards full NOCN qualifications...learners moving from one establishment to another could be tracked and their achievement records maintained.

Celebrating achievement – 25 Years of Open College Networks, page 29

The Skillstrain project²⁹ ran for two years from February 2006 and was funded by the Learning & Skills Council (LSC) in partnership with OCN London Region (OCNLR). The project aimed to certificate existing unaccredited learning and training (vocational and generic) within prisons using the NOCN credit-based qualifications. The lack of formal certification had meant offenders were unable to evidence their skills to potential employers upon release. The hope was that by accrediting work the offenders were already carrying out on a daily basis, this formal recognition would help to encourage further progression and employment, and contribute towards reducing re-offending.

The NOCN Qualifications in Progression are well established through the Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) delivery in each prison and were an obvious choice for the Skillstrain project. The ultimate aim of the project was to progress offenders from custody and community sentences through to employment by providing them with unitised qualifications to meet their needs. However, those involved with the project felt the individuals gained a lot more than qualifications:

The benefits of Skillstrain to learners...are widely acknowledged as being broader than anticipated when the project first began. These additional benefits include increased motivation, confidence and aspirations. Evaluations have provided evidence of beneficiaries planning for future employment and showing a desire to improve their own lives and those of their families.

Skillstrain Transition Project, Final report, March 2009, page 10

NOCN employability qualifications: Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) Chelsea 'Places of Change' garden

OCN South West Region (OCNSWR) was a recent supporter of the 'Places of Change' garden at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show in May 2010.³⁰ The regional OCN provided support and advice to 'Places of Change' and ensured the participants achieved a recognised national qualification for their work on the project. The project involved around 500 learners from various backgrounds: the homeless; recovering offenders; and people at risk or marginalised by society, all working

²⁹ See Appendix 6.

³⁰ <http://www.placesofchangegarden.org.uk/>.

together to grow and build the 'Places of Change' garden at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show. The project focused on the development of employability skills through organising and preparing the garden, and the learners were awarded units from the NOCN generic employability Qualifications in Progression.

NOCN – the future

NOCN believes increasing unemployment among the low skilled may well lead to a need for an increase in provision that focuses on, or incorporates elements of, employability skills. Reports consistently cite that employers find employability skills lacking in job applicants and their existing workforce, which suggests there is still a need for the continued teaching and accreditation of generic employability skills.

Contact

For more details on NOCN or the qualifications it offers visit: www.nocn.org.uk

4.5 Rathbone: Retaining strong employer links



Rathbone is a UK-wide voluntary youth sector organisation providing opportunities for young people to transform their life-circumstances by re-engaging with learning, discovering their ability to succeed and achieving progression to further education, training and employment. Rathbone is a National Charity expanding over seventy different sites across the UK.

Derby is home to one of Rathbone's largest training centres and has been operating since the mid 90s, offering both vocational and generic employability qualifications (Foundation Learning) to all of the learners attending the centre. A learner can refer themselves to the centre or via Connexions with whom the Derby centre has good links (Note: changes in government policy means that the Connexions service no longer exists). After a two-week induction, all learners attending the centre are registered on an employability qualification in addition to any vocational units they wish to undertake.

Close employer links

A large proportion of Rathbone's success can be accredited to its strong links with employers, which means that learners are able to benefit from meaningful work placements. Rathbone Derby works with a number of local employers and charities to offer learners six weeks of work experience and some learners have even progressed on to take an Apprenticeship. Rathbone's employer links have flourished over time and several local businesses now regularly take on their learners.

“Kieran Mullin Training works successfully with Rathbone to deliver our Foundation Learning course in Hairdressing and Barbering. This facilitates not only personal development for the learner but, in many cases, progression onto our Apprenticeship programme.”

Kieran Mullin Training

These strong employer links are further backed by the vocational qualifications it offers in construction, business and administration, retail, hairdressing and engineering. Rathbone believes that participating in work experience demonstrates the learner's work ethic and commitment and is a useful and practical addition to their curriculum vitae at the end of the programme. Gaining work experience alongside the qualification offers an advantage to the individual when seeking job opportunities. Confirming its commitment to work experience, Rathbone offers opportunities to run the reception desk at the centre so learners can develop their administration skills.

Rathbone regularly assesses the organisations who offer work experience to their learners. Alongside the assessment and, to ensure the most beneficial experience for the learner, Rathbone keeps the organisations informed of what the individual is learning in the training centre to facilitate the opportunities for that learning to be applied in a workplace setting. In addition, regular reviews with the employers ensure that Rathbone staff are aware of the learner's progress and any potential issues that may arise during the placement.



To prepare the learners for their work experience, Rathbone Derby has a “mock-shop” it opens up to the learners. In the shop they teach the learner to manage

stock and money, price the goods, use the till, be customer facing and to understand how to merchandise and market their products.

Employability qualifications

Rathbone offers the City and Guilds Entry 2, Entry 3 and Level 1 Award and Certificate in Employability in Personal and Social Development across its UK centres. All the learners attending the centre take the employability qualifications whether they are doing additional vocational units or not. The qualifications are assessed through a portfolio of evidence which allows the learner to take responsibility for their own work and take pride in their study:

“There are no examinations in the qualification which works best with this cohort of learners. We introduce the portfolio from induction, we encourage them to take ownership for their own work, they have to cross reference it to the standards and we counter check it...We encourage them to take ownership and to keep their files up to date so it’s giving them the skill to understand they need to do so. By following this process they understand what they have learnt and the qualification a bit more.”

Lead Tutor, Rathbone Derby

Rathbone likes the flexibility offered by the City and Guilds qualification as it allows tutors to be creative in how it is delivered and does not require them to follow a rigid curriculum. Wherever possible, the tutors aim to turn the units into real life scenarios and encourage learners think about situations around them that could be linked to the employability qualification they are studying. One example of this is the ‘Community Action’ and ‘Community Project’ units in the City and Guilds qualification. These units allow learners to plan their projects and to get involved in something outside of their normal learning environment. Whilst working towards these units, learners have organised events such as planting a garden at a local school, making jewellery to raise money for a charity and organising a Macmillan coffee morning dressed as mugs to raise money for those affected by cancer.³¹

³¹ See Appendix 6.

“They went to a school where they did the garden and replanted stuff. They went and they loved it. I asked them why they liked it. They replied; ‘well, I didn’t know how to garden before, we worked in a team, we found how important it is that everyone does their own job as we all had accountability, we found out how frustrating it is if somebody slacked off’. It gave them the skills to think about how their actions affect others within the working environment; it got them to think about it in a different way... It’s something to make them more motivated.”

Lead Tutor, Rathbone Derby

Rathbone recognises its learner’s achievements throughout the programme and certificate units as they achieve them. This not only motivates the learner but encourages others to take part. A learner who benefitted from this process reported how he valued the Rathbone programme:

“I’m really happy now. I’m glad I came here because if I were somewhere else I wouldn’t have achieved as much as I have here. I’d definitely recommend others to come here...it is a great sense of achievement. I am only 17 but have been able to get out there and work at a young age so it’s benefiting me. When I come back I’m going to give everyone presents, when I’m a millionaire!”

Learner, Rathbone Derby

Contact

For more information on Rathbone contact: <http://www.rathboneuk.org/>

4.6 Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service: A whole organisation approach to employability



Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service:
Providing courses for work & everyday life

Wirral Lifelong Learning and Family Learning Service (WL&FLS) provides learning programmes for families and adults both directly and through partners. It has three main centres in Rock Ferry, Birkenhead and Leasowe, all of which are in areas of disadvantage and aim to engage the hard-to-reach learners.

The organisation, which was set up around eight years ago, currently offers qualifications in literacy and numeracy and up until August 2010 was also funded to deliver ASDAN employability qualifications.

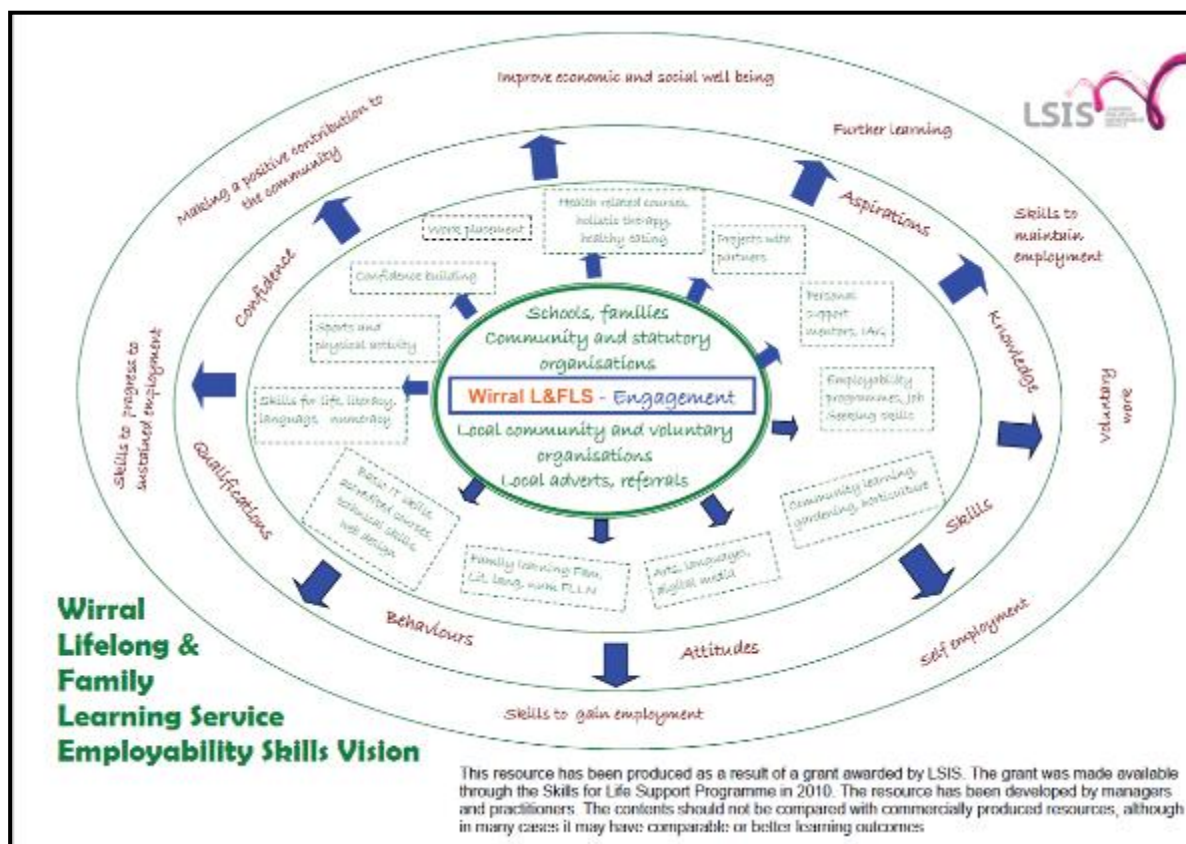
Despite no longer offering employability qualifications, WL&FLS continues to acknowledge the importance of these skills, adopting a whole organisational approach to employability. The centre's continuation of employability learning without funding emphasises the value it places on these skills and the aspiration it holds for its learners.

“Employability skills are about coping skills, it’s being able to cope with your life and have aspirations and the confidence to move it forward.” Curriculum Leader,
Skills for Life, WL&FLS

Service delivery

WL&FLS had a vision of using the Asset Skills Employability Matrix as a framework on which to build its whole service offer. WL&FLS produced an Employability Skills Vision with the aim of embedding employability within all of its services delivered in the organisation.

The vision is featured below:³²



The whole organisation approach means that both staff and learners alike have been able to increase their awareness of the range and breadth of employability skills. These skills have been embedded across the range of qualification programmes offered at the centre, such as literacy and numeracy, and allow the learner to recognise the skills they already have and their areas for development. WL&FLS firmly believes that by focusing the learner on the skills they are gaining, they increase in confidence and are encouraged to achieve their own goals.

Many learners progress to further study, gain employment or voluntary placements or become active in their local Parent Teachers Association ... learners are keen and remain engaged in their learning ... most learners show a marked increase in their confidence and their self-esteem. Many gain the confidence and skills to progress from non-accredited to accredited programmes.

Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council, Ofsted Report, March 2010

³² See Appendix 6.

As part of the service vision adopted by WL&FLS, an employability poster was produced for display throughout the centre.³³ The posters were well received by learners and staff and were found to be a useful and easily accessible tool, which gave an insight to the employability skills required by employers. The staff use the poster as a focus for delivering learning sessions at the centre, and learners find it useful as a quick checklist of skills.

Delivery of provision

Staff at WL&FLS have embedded employability into their Skills for Life programmes on Literacy and Numeracy. For instance, numeracy skills are taught with reference to National Insurance payments; managing budgets; fractions within cookery; planning travel using bus timetables, the 24 hour clock, maps and budgeting for a car.

Tutors at the centre are aware that adult provision needs to be a very different learning experience to school. This is achieved by creating a small friendly environment and ensuring lessons are delivered imaginatively and in bite-sized learning chunks. The combination of embedded employability so the individual is unaware it is being taught, but can still identify the skills they have learnt, and a learning-friendly environment delivers results in terms of confidence levels and self-esteem between first joining the programme and on completion.

“The big difference in the learners is in the things we don’t assess in a formal way. The self-confidence, self-esteem, we don’t assess that in a formal way as we can’t. We know anecdotally by looking at them...what’s important from an employability view is that these people learn to communicate with other people and get to develop a bit, using their new-found confidence to go out and learn new things. ..Surely that’s what employability is about? It’s not about getting the piece of paper to say I can do this, that or the other, it’s about saying I’m ready to work now whereas before I wasn’t. That’s what our job is and that’s where the satisfaction comes. If I’ve done that in 15 weeks then that’s our job done.” Tutor, WL&FLS

As well as equipping the learner with confidence, the programmes can also assist them with finding a new job whether it be permanent or voluntary; helping the learner

³³ See Appendix 6.

to progress either to a higher level qualification; another accredited qualification, or by assisting the learner to explore the opportunities open to them.

“The learners really appreciate how the course has built their confidence and they have moved into other qualifications to get their Level 1 or 2. They now have the confidence to apply for more jobs. I remember them starting the programme and when they had finished the confidence and difference in their attitudes is amazing.”

Tutor, WL&FLS

Alongside offering qualifications, WL&FLS has been involved in various projects aimed at equipping the individual with the skills needed to progress, one example of which is the Wirral Jobs Programme. This project got the learners involved with team building, away days, role plays and ultimately a work placement. The learner took part in four weeks of learning (two days learning, one day job club) and then went on a work placement, with all activities aimed at building social skills and boosting confidence in the ability to achieve. The centre found this programme to be extremely productive and so far have found 43 confirmed job opportunities and a further seven potential jobs for individuals.

The Asset Skills Employability Matrix

“We like the Matrix, we just adapted it slightly. We liked the standards as from our point of view they were great for raising awareness with the Job Centre, our staff and our partners...the Matrix has been brilliant as it is there for us to use in different ways.” Curriculum Leader, Skills for Life, WL&FLS

As part of its overall employability vision, WL&FLS uses the Matrix in a number of ways.

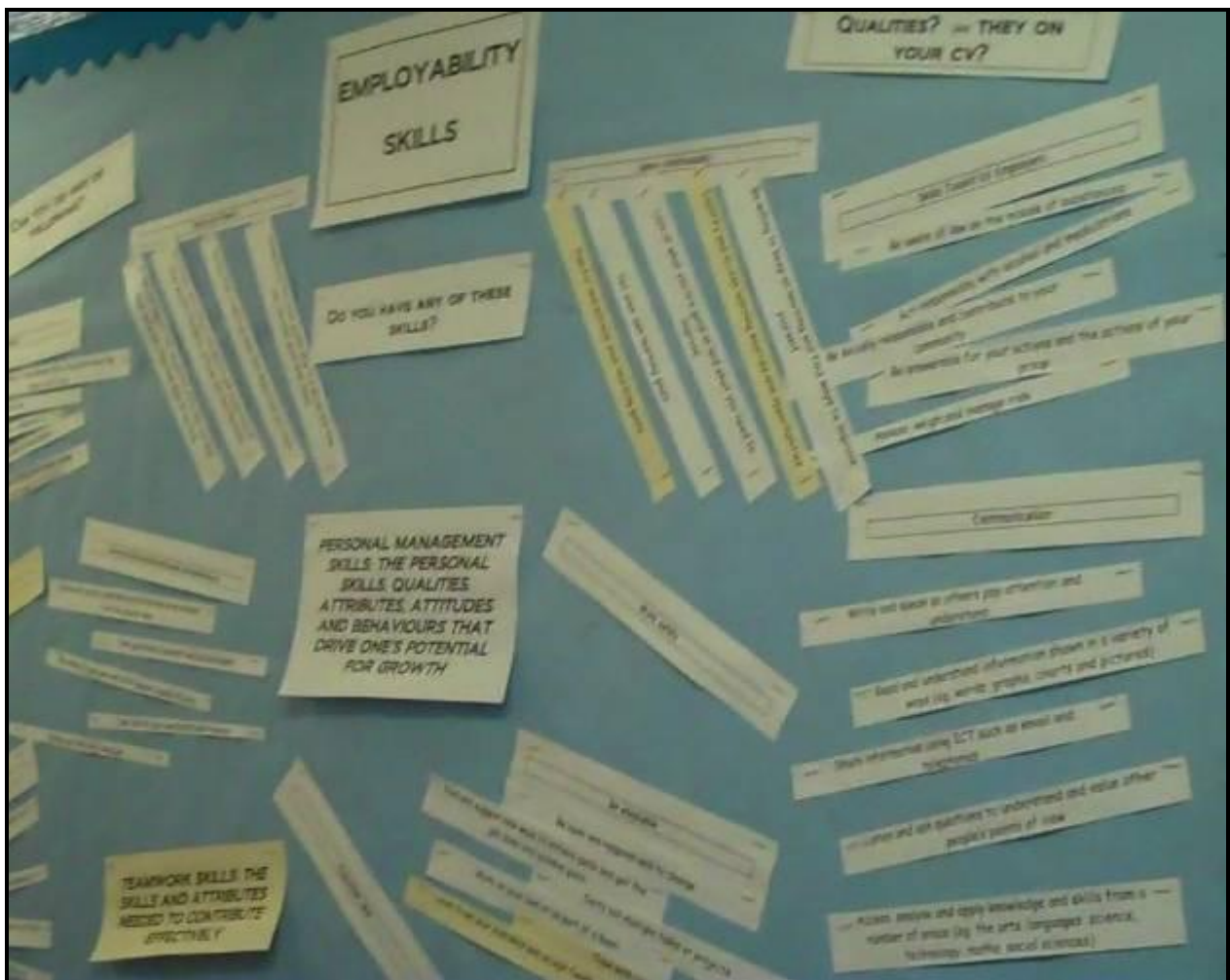
1. Service delivery

The service delivery plan was based on the Asset Skills Employability Matrix standards. This vision was developed alongside other informative documents to clearly indicate the ethos of the organisation to all those involved.

2. Skills diagnostic tool

The Matrix was adapted by WL&FLS to further benefit the centre and its learners. The adapted Matrix was used as an individual skills assessment to ensure the right

learning programme was followed for learners arriving at the centre. Once staff became familiar with the standards and process the Matrix became embedded as a skills diagnostic tool and became redundant as simply a skills tick list. The Matrix is used by WL&FLS as an individual skills checker for learners arriving at the organisation³⁴. As a result of the Matrix, staff are confident of what to look for and can easily assess the areas for development in the individual. The picture below is WL&FLS adaption of the employability Matrix which is on show to learners, tutors and visitors.



3. Employability standards training

The Matrix standards have been adapted by WL&FLS to train both internal staff and external stakeholders they work with such as the Job Centre Plus. The aim of the training is to ensure those involved with the centre, understand the employability

³⁴ See Appendix 6.

skills required by employers and therefore the standards to work to. The training also aimed to ensure staff understood employability is not just about searching for a job but a range of broader skills that should be embedded within everyday learning activities.

4. The Matrix refocused

In this uncertain economic climate, WL&FLS has refocused the Matrix from pre-employment to “new employability” to help council employees currently facing redundancy, redeployment or increased responsibility. WL&FLS delivers Level 2 Numeracy and Literacy qualifications to the workers which it is currently repackaging to embed employability within the content. This is an encouraging example of where training providers are using the standards in an imaginative manner and proves the Matrix has several uses for different audiences.

Contact

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SECTION FIVE: APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Asset Skills Approved Generic Employability Qualifications

Appendix 2: The Asset Skills Employability Matrix Version 3

Appendix 3: Blank questionnaires used for the different audiences interviewed:

- Awarding Organisations
- Employers
- Learners
- Training providers

Appendix 4: Completed questionnaires from each participant

Appendix 5: OLASS Employability Skills Checklist

Appendix 6: Supporting Material for the Case Studies

- ASDAN
- Edexcel
- NOCN
- Rathbone
- Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service