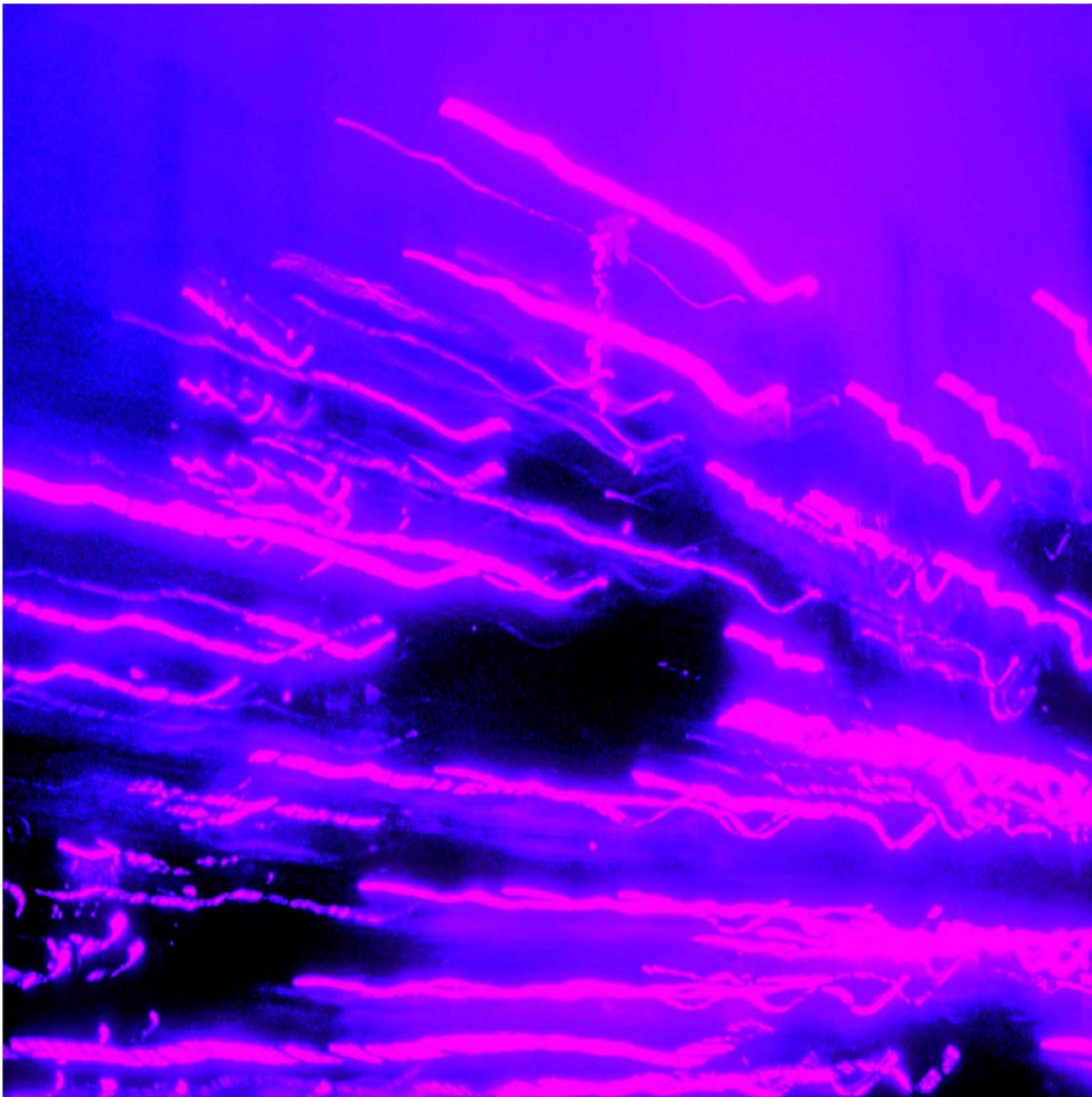


# Skills for Life Support Programme

## Becoming work ready A practical guide to developing employability skills provision



# Becoming work ready

## A practical guide to developing employability skills provision

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### Acknowledgments and list of case studies

We would like to thank the following providers who contributed to this publication:

Provider	Employability provision focus	Case study
Acorn Training	Foundation Learning (E2E)	✓
Bedford Training Group Ltd (BTG)	E2E and programme-led apprenticeships for learners aged 16–19	✓
Blackpool Adult and Community Learning Service	Meeting the employability skills needs of deprived communities	✓
Bournemouth Church Housing Association (BCHA)	New Deal for learners aged 18+	✓
Burleigh College	LSC pilot: supporting parents with language barriers into employment	✓
Croydon College	Foundation Learning (E2E)	✓
Exchange Group	Response to redundancy programmes	✓
HMP Haverigg	Five-week employability skills course	
HMP YOI Hindley	Catering learners developing employability skills at work in the staff mess	✓
HMP Liverpool	Developing a RARPA framework for employability informed by the Asset Skills employability matrix	
HMP YOI Low Newton	Preparation for employment	✓
Lufton College	Pathways to independence, to employment and to living/working in the community	✓
HMP Wolds	Linking all learning and work across the prison regime to employability skills development	✓
Riverside Training	Foundation Learning pilot integrating employability skills, Construction and ICT	
Strode College	12-week employability programme run in seven prisons in the South West	✓
Support into Work	New Deal for learners aged 18+	
Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service	Embedding employability across all programmes offered by the Service	

# Skills for Life Support Programme

## Introduction

### Background

#### Why are employability skills so important? What are they?

In general terms, they can be defined as:

*“Employability skills are the skills almost everyone needs to do almost any job.”*  
UKCES, 2009

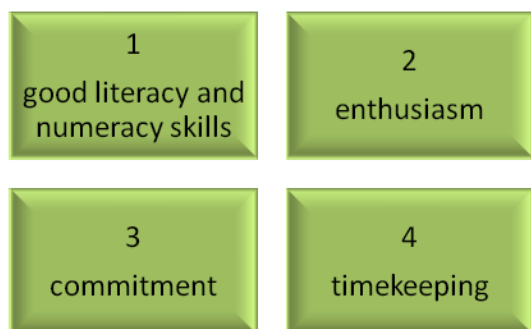
There are many definitions of employability skills. However, all are very similar in that they include an emphasis on:

- personal communication skills
- using numbers, words and technology
- problem solving
- team working
- customer care.

Most established definitions emphasise the importance of literacy, language, numeracy and ICT skills – or Skills for Life - in underpinning a person’s work readiness.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) estimates that, of those adults who are unemployed for six months or more, 30 per cent have literacy and numeracy skills below functional levels.<sup>1</sup>

A survey of over 1,100 employers by the LSN<sup>2</sup> identified the ‘big four’ employability skills as:



Around half of respondents stated that the lack of any of these would prevent a job offer being made.

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<sup>1</sup> DfES and DWP, 2007, *A Shared Evidence Base – The Role of Skills in the Labour Market*.

<sup>2</sup> LSN *Employability skills explored*, 2008

## Skills for Life Support Programme

### LSIS Skills for Life Support Programme and employability

In view of the importance of functional literacy, language, numeracy and ICT skills to finding and keeping a job, the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) Skills for Life Support Programme (SfLSP), which ran from September 2009 to March 2010, had a priority focus on supporting providers to develop employability skills provision that is responsive to learner and employer needs.

This guide has been informed by the experiences of the 17 providers who participated in the Programme and were identified as having developed interesting and effective employability skills provision. Their practice was captured during site visits in February 2010. The providers work in a range of settings, with a wide range of learner groups across all regions. On page 4, we list who they are.

The names of providers for whom there are case studies are emboldened in **green** in this document.

### Audience and purpose of this guide

This guide has been written for managers and practitioners planning and delivering employability skills provision that includes a focus on developing the literacy, language and numeracy skills crucial to sustained employment. It is relevant for:

- all learning and skills settings including adult and community organisations, independent training providers, further education colleges and offender learning providers
- those working with a wide range of client groups including offenders, learners with learning difficulties and disabilities, and speakers of other languages.

The guide is designed to enable you to use the experiences and lessons learnt from the 17 providers to inform your own employability provision.

### Structure and content

**Section 1: Meeting the challenge** presents a practical summary in tabular format of the challenges the 17 providers faced and their top tips for meeting those challenges. It signposts to case studies and particular sections of the toolkit where more information can be found.

**Section 2: What makes effective employability skills provision?** pulls out key messages from the providers' practice at key stages:

getting started → planning → delivery → supporting progress, achievement and progression.

**Appendix 1** includes 12 detailed **Provider Case Studies**. Within some of the case studies, you will find links indicated in **purple** to materials which you can download and adapt for your own use.

## Skills for Life Support Programme

**Appendix 2** is a matrix of resources that enables you to identify those that are appropriate for:

- supporting learners to develop particular employability skills such as maths, problem solving or teamwork
- those in particular roles, for example, literacy and numeracy tutor or employability tutor.

A **training pack, Developing employability provision that works**, has also been developed as part of this project. This can be accessed at <http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/269853>

### Language

This guide uses both the phrase Skills for Life – or more often literacy, language and numeracy – to describe the particular skills of English (literacy), English (ESOL) and mathematics (numeracy). Skills for Life and literacy, language and numeracy are the current most familiar terms but with the advent of functional skills English and mathematics will become more frequently used descriptions and will certainly be more familiar to your partners and most employers than the phrase Skills for Life.

The term 'learner' is used throughout the guide to refer to service users (clients, customers, offenders, and so on).

# Skills for Life Support Programme

## Section 1: Meeting the challenge

Challenges identified by the providers when developing effective employability skills provision fall into two general categories:

1. Meeting the often complex needs of the learner/client group
2. Working within the constraints of funding and/or funded programmes.

The tables which follow detail the challenges and summarise providers' top tips for meeting those challenges. They signpost to case studies in Appendix 1 and particular sections of the toolkit where more information can be found.



## Challenges and Top Tips

1. Meeting the needs of your target learner group		
The Challenge	Top Tips	Supporting case studies; sections of the guide
Many of the target learner groups have complex needs which can arise from low skills levels, health/mental health difficulties, difficult personal circumstances, low self-esteem and confidence, and negative experiences of learning	Know your learners – analyse their needs	Section 2.2.1 BCHA, Acorn Training, Bedford Training Group (BTG)
	Support learners' basic needs, e.g. financial, health, housing, transport as well as their skills needs Include mechanisms for 1:1 support and regular review Develop mentors and job coaches	Section 2.3.6 Burleigh College, Lufton College
	Plan flexibility into your programme so that it accommodates learners' personal circumstances Support staff to access appropriate training, for example in information, advice and guidance, counselling	Section 2.2.5; Exchange Group Burleigh College, Croydon College

## Skills for Life Support Programme

Designing a programme that is engaging, relevant and meets learner and employer needs	<p>Identify the particular employability skills important to your learner group</p> <p>Use a planning framework such as the Asset Skills Employability matrix</p>	<b>Section 2.2.2</b>
	<p>Make sure skills development takes place within a real work context and ideally within a real work environment.</p> <p>Include work placements</p> <p>Be bold and experiment!</p>	<b>Section 2.3.3; HMP YOI Hindley, Strode College, Croydon College, Acorn Training, Lufton College</b>
	<p>Positively promote and embed literacy, language, numeracy and ICT skills</p>	<b>Section 2.3.4; BTG, HMP YOI Hindley</b>
	<p>Use local labour market information when planning your offer</p>	<b>Section 2.2.6; Exchange Group, BTG</b>
	<p>Involve employers in providing work placements, informing your programme, speaking to learners</p>	<b>Sections 2.2.6, 2.3.3; Lufton, BCHA</b>
	<p>Use active learning approaches</p>	<b>Section 2.3.5; HMP YOI Hindley</b>
	<p>Develop external partnerships that will enable your provision to be responsive to learners' needs</p>	<b>Section 2.1.2; Blackpool Adult and Community Learning Service, Acorn Training</b>

## Skills for Life Support Programme

Finding the time to plan and develop programme models, approaches and resources	Set up collaborative working so that staff support each other and share skills in a peer-coaching model Buddy up with local providers to share practice, challenges and solutions	<b>Section 2.1.2; Burleigh College, Strode College; HMP YOI Hindley</b>
	Be aware of the resources available to support you	<b>Appendix 2 Employability Resources Matrix</b>
Changing attitudes, raising awareness, developing staff skills to deliver learner responsive employability skills programmes	Adopt a whole organisation approach to developing employability skills Run awareness sessions to develop a whole organisation vision of and approach to employability skills Ensure management steer and support	<b>Section 2.1.1; HMP Wolds</b>
	Identify the skills your staff need and support them to access appropriate professional development	<b>Section 2.3.1</b>
<b>2. Working within the constraints of funding and/or funded programmes</b>		
<b>The Challenge</b>	<b>Top Tips</b>	<b>Supporting case studies; sections of the guide</b>
Dealing with a constantly changing learner group in a roll-on/roll-off model	Ensure learners have individual targets	<b>Section 2.2.4</b>
	Plan flexibility into your programme	<b>Section 2.2.5; Burleigh College</b>
	Include elements of online learning	<b>Exchange Group</b>
Meeting individual learner needs	Develop individualised programmes	<b>Section 2.2.4 &amp; Section 2.4.3</b>

## Skills for Life Support Programme

<p>and recognising individual progression within funded programmes that have prescribed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• elements</li> <li>• qualifications – for example, funding only one Skills for Life qualification at one level</li> <li>• course length</li> </ul> <p>and a focus on qualifications rather than on individual progression</p>	<p>Seek out additional funding opportunities</p>	<p><b>BCHA, Burleigh College</b></p>
	<p>Offer supplementary online learning, outside of required framework</p> <p>Maximise work placements to meet individual needs</p>	<p><b>Acorn Training, BCHA, Exchange Group</b></p>
	<p>Tailor prescribed programme elements to meet individual needs, interests and aspirations e.g. at Acorn Training a standard customer service is tailored to individual's job aspirations</p>	<p><b>Acorn Training</b></p>
<p>Accessing funding to offer employability qualifications</p>	<p>Recognise progression and achievement using the RARPA approach via ILPs</p> <p>Offer in-house certificates</p>	<p><b>Section 2.4.2</b></p> <p><b>Strode College, HMP Wolds</b></p>

## Section 2: What makes effective employability skills provision

This section pulls out the key factors for success from the 17 providers' practice. These have been grouped under the following stages:



### 2.1 Getting started

#### 2.1.1 A whole organisation approach

Most of the providers have implemented a whole organisation approach to embedding employability skills development in everything they do, as well as, or in some cases instead of, putting on specific employability skills courses. They view employability skills as underpinning all the work they do with their learners.

This is particularly the case in offender learning. As employment is recognised as one of the three main factors influencing a prisoner's likelihood to reoffend on release alongside family and housing, developing employability skills is seen as a whole organisation responsibility.

**HMP Wolds** has developed a framework, based on the Asset Skills Employability Matrix, which will link all learning and work across the prison regime to employability skills development. They describe it as a 'wrap around' employability skills programme which will enable prisoners to work towards employability targets wherever they are in the prison – in education, in work/training or on the wings. The programme aims to give everyone working with prisoners a common focus.

*"Most prisoners at HMP Wolds come to education as a starting point before taking up work opportunities. The employability skills development will start in education and then follow prisoners out into work across the prison."*

Learning and Skills Manager

HMP Liverpool has developed a similar framework, currently being phased in one industrial workshop at a time. Eventually, all 1200 prisoners will be introduced to the employability framework at induction. See [HMP Liverpool's Whole prison individual learning plan](#).

## Skills for Life Support Programme

Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service is promoting employability skills development to all their stakeholders, partners, staff and learners. **Their vision** is of employability skills development as a key element of lifelong learning and therefore of all their programmes. They are mapping the underpinning employability skills that learners develop on all their programmes so that these can be recognised, developed and valued by staff as well as by learners.

They too, have used the Asset Skills Employability Matrix to develop promotional material, **self-assessment activities** and to map their provision to employability outcomes. As a result of the mapping, when signing up to a course, learners will be able to see the employability skills that are embedded into it. The intention is that this will help determine their course selection, based on their needs. For example, some programmes will enable learners to focus more on personal management skills while others will develop aspects of team working.

### The Asset Skills Employability Matrix

**A. Fundamental Skills:** *The skills needed as a base for further development – communication, use numbers and 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 and 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, and customer care.*

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

### 2.1.2 Working in partnership

#### Within an organisation

With the holistic, learner-centred approach to developing employability skills adopted by the providers, effective partnership working across teams within an organisation has been vital for success. Examples of effective collaborative working between teams or individuals responsible for:

- vocational learning
- literacy, language, numeracy and ICT learning
- employability skills
- work placements
- information, advice and guidance (IAG)
- re-settlement (offender learning)

and are evident across all the providers.

## Skills for Life Support Programme

At Riverside Training, the focus of their pilot has been to develop an integrated Foundation Learning programme that combines the delivery of all aspects of a City and Guilds Employability qualification at entry level 3 and level 1, brickwork and joinery and ICT functional skills.

Collaboration between members responsible for the various elements has been crucial. For three months, the team, with support from the Skills for Life Support Programme, met weekly to develop the programme. Working in partnership has enabled staff to learn about each other's area and to make connections with their own. It has helped to develop a culture of creativity and innovation. Working with colleagues with a range of different specialisms has meant that individuals have felt able to suggest ideas outside of their own skills' set that they would not have considered had they been working alone. For example, on a number of occasions vocational staff have suggested ICT activities that they would not have suggested if they were planning alone.

At **Burleigh College**, the learner's combined individual employment plan and individual learning plan is agreed by the language teacher, the employability mentor and the IAG staff. Progress is reviewed every three weeks by the language teacher and the employability mentor.

**Strode College's** model links together the education and employment staff. The prison industry supervisors/instructors were involved in developing the employability programme. They assess learners' employability skills during every work session and meet with the employability tutor each week to discuss learner progress.

At **HMPYOI Hindley**, the partnership between the vocational trainer (head chef), the learning support practitioner, the vocational manager and the Skills for Life manager has meant that embedded learning activities can be developed holistically.

### External partnerships

Providers talk about the importance of working with external partners – for example to support recruitment on to their programmes; provide specialist information, advice and guidance; inform programme design; and support learners into work placements and employment.

As part of its vision of employability skills' development across all its programmes, Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service see a key role for its partners – schools, family learning partners, local community and voluntary organisations, and Job Centre Plus. As they all play a part in referral or delivery, they will be needed to help learners identify the employability skills they already have and those that they can develop on their programme.

At HMP Haverigg, Job Centre Plus seconds a member of staff for a fixed period each week to support those on the employability skills programme with applications for benefits, community grants, etc.

## Skills for Life Support Programme

Local children's centres support **Burleigh College's** employability programme by providing not only convenient premises for the training but also childcare facilities for the learners' children.

At HMP Liverpool, the prison establishment, Working Links (an IAG provider), NACRO and Job Centre Plus work together during Reducing Re-offending Pathways meetings. The employer liaison officer works with local employers and facilitates partnership planning with Jobcentre Plus who understand what training the prison delivers and how this connects to the needs of the local labour market.

**Blackpool Adult and Community Learning Service** works with partners in the community to ensure that programmes meet the needs of the local communities and to recruit learners. For example, the Salvation Army has commissioned a bespoke 'preparing for employability' provision, referred to as the Bridge Project, to which they refer learners. There are also referrals from libraries, schools, children's centres, Job Centre Plus and doctors' surgeries who work with community development agencies that are looking to develop people to gain work experience as volunteers in the first instance and then move on to employment.

**Acorn Training** works in partnerships with a range of organisations to enable them to deliver a holistic programme to their 16–19 year old learners:

- Amber Valley Youth Team – drugs and alcohol training
- Derbyshire Primary Care Trust – sexual health awareness
- Derbyshire Police – anti-social behaviour and crime prevention
- Youth Offending Team – supporting and preventing lapses into crime
- Local School of Dance – developing learners' confidence to work with each other and activities to support healthy living
- Local Businesses – encouraging creativity and enterprise.

## 2.2 Planning

### 2.2.1 Identifying and meeting learners' basic needs

When designing their provision, the providers started with a thorough analysis of their learners' needs, looking at their personal circumstances, their barriers to employment, their interests and aspirations, and typical skills' profile.

Because of the nature of their target group, several of the providers place great importance on meeting learners' basic needs which need to be addressed before they can begin to develop the skills to become work ready.

**Bournemouth Church Housing Association's (BCHA)** main concern is the 'revolving door syndrome' where learners go round and round the system because their needs are not being addressed. BCHA aims to remove barriers that can prevent a client finding and keeping work such as dealing with debt or health issues that impact on a client's ability to attend and concentrate at interviews. Housing advice is critically important to many clients; if they are in danger of losing their homes, they



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are less likely to keep a placement that could lead to employment, either because they have to move away or because they cannot concentrate at work.

At **Acorn Training**, for 16–18 year olds support is also extended to families. One learner whose family was struggling to afford food and pay bills was invited into the centre to access support in claiming child benefit. As a result the learner could remain on the programme.

**Croydon College's** programme targets 16–18 year olds with multiple and complex needs. Many of their learners live independently or are in care as a result of a dysfunctional family, while others have been victims of sexual abuse or are alcohol and drug misusers or self-harmers. Others are homeless but are too old (18+) to come under the care of social services. To help these learners, the college runs a daily breakfast club and staff have counselling training to enable them to give better support.

**Bedford Training Group**, working with a similar learner group, offers a free minibuss pick-up for learners who live outside the transport network.

### Meeting the needs of deprived communities

**Blackpool Adult and Community Learning Service** has used local labour market information to identify potential learners in the most deprived areas. They then work with agencies to identify the needs of these learners and provide suitable programmes, directed at supporting the most vulnerable and operated in the heart of these communities so that the venues are accessible to learners.

### 2.2.2 Identifying learners' employability skills needs

#### Using a planning framework

Several providers, including **HMP Wolds**, Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service, Riverside Training and **HMP YOI Hindley** used a ready developed framework, the Asset Skills Employability Matrix, to inform their programme planning.

*“The project developments started with the team being introduced to the Asset Skills Employability Matrix during specifically-designed workshops run by the Skills for Life Support Programme. These sessions were designed to support us to develop activities linked to some of the employability fundamental skills. Once we had a good understanding of the personal management and teamwork skills, we were able to see how the activities we developed would link across to all aspects of the Employability Skills Matrix.”* **HMPYOI Hindley**

*“We used the Asset Skills Employability Matrix to plan our programme. Once we had identified the wide-ranging skills that learners can develop across their training programme by analysing the matrix, we used the awarding body's employability assessment criteria to develop integrated assessment guidance/tracking for staff/learners to be used across all elements of the programme, that is employability, functional skills, and joinery and brickwork.” Riverside Training*

### A learner-centred approach

Other providers started by analysing the skills needed by their particular learner group to become work ready. Because of their learner-centred approach, providers identified different skills sets in addition to the literacy and numeracy skills that all considered essential. For Lufton College, working with learners with learning difficulties and disabilities, health and safety awareness is a priority to ensure their learners' safety in the workplace. For Burleigh College working with speakers of other languages, language skills for the workplace are paramount. And for providers working with disengaged young people, learning to learn skills are fundamental to improving their employability.

The following lists give a flavour of the different employability skills identified:

Lufton	Strode (7 prisons in the South West)	HMP Haverigg	Croydon College	Burleigh College
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Health and safety</li> <li>•Appropriate dress</li> <li>•Follow instructions</li> <li>•Acceptable behaviour</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Punctuality</li> <li>•Motivation and concentration</li> <li>•Manner and language</li> <li>•Work independently</li> <li>•Interaction with others</li> <li>•Attention to Health and Safety in the workplace</li> <li>•Quality of work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Speaking and Listening skills</li> <li>•Non - verbal skills, for example, appropriate body language</li> <li>•Ability to work with others and control negative feeling and aggression</li> <li>•Job application and interview skills</li> <li>•Basic survival skills such as budgeting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Learning to learn</li> <li>•Learning that they can make a contribution</li> <li>•Increasing their attention span</li> <li>•Being able to take initiative and make decisions - feeling empowered</li> <li>•Being independent thinkers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Language skills in the context of the working environment</li> <li>•Time management skills: getting used to a structure of attendance and time keeping</li> <li>•Organisational skills: arranging family commitments around work</li> </ul>

### 2.2.3 Designing a programme model

With a learner-centred approach, providers' programme models look very different in order to meet the needs of their particular learner group. These range from a modular to a whole organisation approach to employability.

Programmes vary in length either to meet the requirements of programme frameworks, such as New Deal<sup>3</sup>, Foundation Learning or Response to Redundancy<sup>4</sup>, or to fit in with the learner context, for example the length of time offenders stay at a particular prison.

#### A modular approach

Some programmes are modular with elements selected to meet the interests and skills needs of the learner group or the skills needs of local employers

At HMP Haverigg, the priority employability skills they have identified – working with others, speaking and listening, and seeing things through – are developed through the following elements:

- Budgeting and finance – planning and organising expenditure, how to save, credit unions, building societies, banking, shopping and dealing with unexpected expenses
- Career planning – what employers are looking for, What skills do I have?, creating a CV, completing application forms and a formal mock interview (in shirt and tie, not prison greens) with feedback
- Men's health – relationships, nutrition, fitness, contraception, alcohol, nicotine and drug use/misuse and common cancers.

**Exchange Group** includes the following vocational modules in line with the skills that are in demand locally:

- Business administration
- Customer service
- Retail
- Management
- Team-leading.

**HMPYOI Low Newton**'s programme focuses on searching and applying for a job and has a strong focus on interview preparation. This is particularly effective because it is delivered in the context of preparing learners for the Home Detention Curfew (tagging) interview. Achieving HDC status is an important goal for the learners, but in working towards this, they are developing skills that are transferable

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<sup>3</sup> Department of Work and Pensions initiative for jobseekers that aims to help them find a job or get training or work experience to help them find employment

<sup>4</sup> Learning and Skills Council and European Social Fund funded programme designed to support both employers and employees who may be involved in the process of redundancy or are likely to be in the near future

## Skills for Life Support Programme

to job interviews on release. Learners feel that the course leaves them better prepared to seek employment:

*“Before I was worried about being asked about my criminal record – I’m not now as I know how to reply to questions about it.”*

Learner, **HMPYOI Low Newton**

### An integrated approach

Other providers offer a model that integrates required programme elements in a cohesive, integrated offer, often under the Foundation Learning Framework where programmes must include subject or vocational learning, functional skills and personal and social development. Employability skills’ development falls within personal and social development.

Riverside Training’s programme combines employability skills, functional ICT and brickwork and joinery in vocationally branded sessions.

### A holistic approach

At **HMP Wolds**, there is no specific employability course; learners work towards employability targets wherever they are in the prison – in education, on the wings or in work/training.

Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Services have specific employability programmes, but they are also planning to map employability skills’ development into all their programmes.

### An engaging approach

Some programmes, particularly those working with learners who can be difficult to engage, work hard to capture the interest of learners in the early stages of the programme, offering the chance to experience a range of learning in small bites.



Learners at Bedford Training Group

At **Bedford Training Group**, two-day vocational tasters are offered in all subjects. Learners then choose which one they are interested in. All learners have to try all tasters so that they can see all the trades available and gain a wider understanding of the industry. This is particularly valuable for learners who don’t really know what they want to do as it helps to keep them engaged and motivated rather than defensive and disruptive.

Riverside Training recognises that the opportunity to develop vocational skills is key to motivating learners to engage with developing generic work readiness skills, including literacy, numeracy, language and ICT skills. Since learners would be motivated by the vocational element of their programme, that is for joinery; all other skills' development, covering literacy, language and numeracy, ICT and employability, is hung on to this central element or 'skeleton'.

### 2.2.4 Individualised programmes

Within a programme framework, learners have individual programmes and work towards individual targets. At **Lufton College**, the staff identify what might stop an individual being employed, for example a habit such as an inability to stop interrupting, and work on developing appropriate skills.

Individualised programmes are often the basis for effective delivery to a constantly changing learner group within a roll-on roll-off offer. Many providers commented that roll-on roll-off provision was "not a problem" because learners were working towards individual targets at their own pace.

Providers have developed assessment and tracking systems to monitor individual learners' employability skills across all elements of their programme.

### 2.2.5 Flexible models

In order to be responsive to learner needs, all providers stress the importance of flexibility, though this is often challenging within the constraints of programme-funding frameworks. Flexibility is crucial in supporting engagement, retention and achievement.

For learners with a wide range of skills levels, **Exchange Group** has focused on developing a flexible model that enables learners to select learning appropriate to their needs. The offer is modular with a significant online element underpinned by face-to-face support. After initial assessment, the tutor helps the learner to identify their career aspirations, write an action plan and then select courses, some of which are short (often from three to six hours). The course menu includes:

- Business administration
- Customer service
- Retail
- Management
- Team-leading
- Personal development: this is Exchange Group's most popular course and includes how to learn, self-development needs, interpersonal skills, managing stress and time-management
- IT
- Skills for Life at Entry 3 and Level 2

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The length of courses can vary; 60% of learners take 15–45 guided learning hours and 40% will do 45–75 guided learning hours. Many increase the number of hours once they have tried out a course. The e-learning, short modules and flexibility around guided learning hours and open access all help to manage the challenges of roll-on roll-off provision.

At **Burleigh College**, the programme is flexible to accommodate learners' parental responsibilities. Courses run during school hours. Where there are difficulties with childcare, learners are not expected to attend during school holidays. This means learners can resume their courses after holidays when on other programmes learners may have to be removed and start again. Learners agree reasonable and achievable attendance requirements. They are encouraged to keep to their agreement since there is a culture of high expectations of attendance and punctuality linked to employers' expectations.

**Acorn Training's** flexible approach allows for time off if a learner is experiencing problems which have a negative impact on their progression.

### 2.2.6 Being employer responsive

Using local labour market information (LMI) ensures that programmes develop the skills employers need. The following are useful sources of information:

- In-house expertise, i.e. any staff/departments dedicated to employer engagement; business development or Train to Gain teams should have LMI
- Regional Development Agencies
- NOMIS website provides official labour market statistics  
<https://www.nomisweb.co.uk>
- Local authority websites
- Job Centre Plus has information about vacancies and employer opportunities in its local areas.

Riverside Training regularly uses local labour market information to ensure their responsiveness to employers' needs. For example, they have recently identified that local businesses need staff with business administration skills. As a result, they are developing a Foundation Learning programme that will combine employability skills, functional skills development with business administration qualifications.

**Exchange Group** thoroughly researches labour market information to inform the menu they offer on their Response to Redundancy programme. They have recently introduced call centre pre-employment in their Wolverhampton centre because this is an expanding sector in the Midlands. They are also introducing food hygiene and the Construction CSCS certificate because these increase people's chances of finding employment. In Leicester they have identified vacancies in care and are partnering with a local organisation to deliver courses for that sector.

**Bedford Training Group's** (BTG) council members (Board of Governors) are all employers, providing up-to-date industry information and contacts and a national perspective on changes in industry to ensure that BTG is responding to market trends. Council members are asked for feedback on curriculum delivery and how it

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needs to be changed to respond to innovation or changes in industry. Their feedback has led to new programming training which combines a working simulation with computer-based activities.

### 2.3 Delivery

#### 2.3.1 Staff with the right skills

*“They need to be willing to step out of their comfort zones in order to meet their learners’ wider needs.”*

June Vernon, Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning

All providers talked of the need for staff delivering employability programmes to have the required qualifications for their roles – as vocational trainers, teachers, or as specialist teachers, for example, in literacy, language and numeracy. Several identified IAG qualifications as being essential. Many were investing significant resource in supporting staff to gain these qualifications. All recognised that employability skills programmes need to be supported by literacy, language and numeracy specialists.

*“It is important for the trainers to talk to the learners to find out what they really want to do and to guide them to try different things and widen their aspirations. Learners need to feel that someone is interested in them so that they can talk through their options and then feel that they have been listened to.”*

**Bedford Training Group**, working with 16–19 year olds

There was a notable consistency across the various provider types about the particular skills needed to support employability skills’ development. They highlighted the need to:

- understand and empathise with their particular learner group and their particular barriers to employment
- buy into a holistic and person-centred approach
- be role models, exemplifying good timekeeping, appropriate dress and language in the workplace, and good team-working when they work collaboratively with colleagues, valuing each other’s skills
- have experience and an understanding of a variety of work contexts so that they can successfully motivate learners to develop their employability skills and make realistic links between, for example, personal management attributes, team-working skills and success in the workplace
- have industry experience where vocational skills are being developed. They need to be able to talk the same language as potential employers
- be flexible, remembering a whole organisation approach to employability skills requires collaborative working

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- be enthusiastic, innovative and creative, particularly where the learner group is disaffected and/or has had bad experiences of learning
- use active teaching and learning approaches and be able to deal with challenging behaviour.

With support from the Skills for Life Support Programme, HMP Liverpool has developed in-house [training in embedding employability skills and literacy, language and numeracy.](#)

### 2.3.2 Initial assessment

Initial assessment for most of the providers includes assessment of literacy, language and numeracy skills. The following tools were typically used:

- Tools Library tools  
<http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/toolslibrary>
- Target Skills  
<http://www.targetskills.net/products.htm>
- Basic Skills Agency (BSA)  
[http://www.niace.org.uk/search/apachesolr\\_search/initial%20assessment](http://www.niace.org.uk/search/apachesolr_search/initial%20assessment)
- BKSB [www.bksb.co.uk/](http://www.bksb.co.uk/)
- Plus assessment tools.

Some include an initial assessment of IT skills. **Exchange Group**, for example, uses a learndirect tool.

Initial assessment for **Bedford Training Group** includes in-house vocational assessment, tailored to each subject area. This helps them to identify learners' reasoning, understanding and aptitude for a range of subjects. (See BTG case study)

Assessment of employability skills often includes the use of questionnaires, self-assessment and observation. Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service has developed [card-based self-assessment activities](#), accompanied by a [self-assessment checklist](#).

At **Burleigh College**, employability and soft skills are diagnostically assessed to inform the combined individual employment plan and individual learning plan (See Burleigh College case study for links to the self-assessment.)

For many providers, the Asset Skills Matrix provides the framework against which to assess learners' employability and set learning targets. (See **Strode College** case study.)

Support into Work carries out Skills Check, a work skills assessment, available through the Next Step programme.



### 2.3.3 Developing skills within a real work context

Providers across all settings emphasise the prime importance of employability skills development within a real work context and ideally within a real work environment. This ensures that learners can see that they are developing the skills to get and keep a job.

*“I understand what an employer wants from me.”*

*“I am more aware of what it takes to be a good employee.”*

Learners at HMP Erlestoke

In two offender learning providers, employability skills development is fully integrated into the prison’s workplaces.

In the seven prisons where **Strode College** delivers its 12-week employability programme, the only entry requirement is that offenders are working in the prison industry workshops, which include lighting, construction, potpourri packaging, furniture assembly, print shops and clothing stores. Although there are two specific sessions each week, employability skills are assessed during every work session by the workshop supervisor. (See case study.)

At **HMPYOI Hindley**, employability skills are developed in the staff mess, which has a working kitchen and serves meals and snacks to both prison staff and visitors. Learners work to develop their employability skills five days per week, seven hours a day. They are managed and given practical training by the head chef, who is a vocational trainer and who also gives one-to-one support and delivers some theory sessions in the learning pod that is attached to the mess. The Learning Support Practitioner spends one day a week with the learners in the mess, delivering group and individual sessions. (See case study.)

### Work placements

Where employability skills development is not fully integrated into the workplace which it is in the examples above, work placements play a key role. Twelve of the seventeen providers offer work placements. For some this is a requirement of the funded programme while others offer work placements where they can.

At **Lufton College**, work placements are a key programme element. Because learners are generally not local, the college seeks placements with national employers such as MacDonald’s, ASDA, Iceland, Nationwide Crash Repairs Peacocks or the Co-op so that, if possible, learners can transfer to a local branch when they leave and go back to their home area. They also have local placements in garages, nurseries, builders, a conservation volunteer trust and a local gardening firm.

Whether learners progress to full employment, supported employment or voluntary work, the aim is to recognise and build their potential. As a result of the work placements, learners become employable – they know the routines and have a

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reference from an employer. Students on placement are well supported by a job coach. Initially the job coach stays with them all the time and then drops back. If this is not possible, then the appropriateness of placement is questioned. Learners are encouraged to select and apply for placements from the list available just as they would apply for a paid job and interviews are real. Staff encourage employers to send learners on the same induction programme as their paid staff.



*Learner work from Lufton College*

It is important that work placements offer realistic work environments. At HMP Liverpool, this means prisoners in workshops should arrive at work on time, not going back to the cells at lunch time (and sleeping), dressing tidily for work, being clean, showing respect to supervisors and, in some cases, giving customers good service in the Timpson's workshop where staff can take along boots and shoes to be repaired in an equivalent to a 'shop front' with a till. Prisoners in this workshop also wear a Timpson's uniform.

Providers report the following as key factors for successful work placements:

- Make sure the placement matches the learner's aspirations; for example, at **Burleigh College**, learners have parental responsibilities and are largely looking for part-time work that fits around school hours and school holidays.
- Effective listening when meeting the employer to effectively identify their needs.
- Make sure there are benefits for employers in getting involved (See **Lufton College** and **BCHA** case study snippets below.)
- Lots of feedback.
- Make sure the learner is well supported.
- The placement needs to give the learner the opportunity to carry out a wide range of activities and to develop their problem-solving skills.
- Support the employer as well as the learner; if the placement isn't working, take the learner out.
- Give employers the choice of a number of learners.

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- If a learner has learning difficulties or mental health difficulties, spend time to ensure that the employer understands exactly the nature of these.
- Set a time limit on the placement partly to ensure that the employer sees it as an opportunity to select a suitable employee and NOT to abuse the process for free labour for a long period.

*“It would not be possible for learners to develop their skills and confidence if, for example, they were asked to peel potatoes all day.”*

Amina Bodhanian, Skills for Life Manager, **HMPYOI Hindley**

### Work placements – what’s in it for the employer?

**Lufton College** offers free training for employers on disability awareness and communication. The staff say that “employers are on side and come back every year”. They run an employers’ evening when students give the employers certificates which might say “You’re a great employer” and include photos of the young person at work.

The placement manager at Support into Work approaches employers locally and talks to them about what they do. He will offer to do a workplace health and safety inspection free of charge (he is qualified to do this). When sharing the results of the inspection, he begins to build a relationship with the employer and to meet other staff there. He will discuss the employer’s needs and suggest that he might introduce one or two suitable learners with their CVs with the possibility of an interview.

To place clients with employers, **BCHA** offers a range of incentives such as 13 weeks unpaid work for an employee, with support, advice on subsidies and funding, information about Train to Gain, “try before you buy” trials of employees, and reassurance for employers that if the client is not appropriate he or she can be moved on.

BCHA doesn’t overburden the employer with extra work; rather BCHA carries out the first client interview, sends details to a matched employer and calls the employer to reaffirm suitability and cover any concerns before an interview with the employer is arranged. Once the client has found a suitable placement, BCHA continues to be involved. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, they keep the employer informed of a client’s success once they have left the work placement in recognition of the role the employer has played in helping the client into employment.

### Reproducing a working environment in the classroom/training room

Where learners are not ready for work placements, providers offer a more supported work experience by reproducing the working environment in the classroom.

At **Croydon College**, learners set up their own job agency so that they can discover what is required to successfully obtain employment. They view the recruitment process from an employer’s perspective, discovering each stage and component

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through experiential but guided learning. They produce all the recruitment documents required, such as:

- job advertisements
- job specifications
- application forms
- interview questions.

Through this experience, they discover what employers are looking for and their own strengths and weaknesses as applicants.

**Acorn Training** has developed a simulated shop called the Steady Shop. Learners work in the shop for two hours, two days a week, playing different roles from management to shop floor. The real-life scenario supports learner engagement. Marketing skills are encouraged through the development of posters and ICT is used to develop artwork. Meetings are planned and agendas managed according to identified job roles. Letters relating to jobs, stock, customer complaints and other real-life challenges are carried out to support English language usage. Sales figures and data is analysed as a result of factual market research which is organised on the streets of Ripley. When learners undertake job roles, ranging from manager to assistant, they soon realise the importance of English and maths as a requirement to secure employment.

**Bedford Training Group** tries to simulate the real work environment as far as possible – for example using clocking-on systems and working to the sound of sirens to instil good timekeeping practices in their learners.

### 2.3.4 Positive promotion and embedding of literacy, language and numeracy and ICT learning

All providers:

- see literacy, language and numeracy skills as crucial to being work- and job-ready
- develop these skills in the context of the workplace
- are up front with learners about the importance of these skills in getting and keeping a job.

*“We present it as an expectation that all learners will achieve key skills at the appropriate level. It is quite simply part of our programme delivery, both as discrete and embedded elements, because the learners will just not be able to do the job without it. So it is a benchmark for us that all learners have it even if we have to provide a lot of additional support to ensure that they are able to achieve the qualifications and that their skills are functional for the workplace.”*

**Bedford Training Group**

Providers, particularly those working with learner groups who do not readily engage with literacy, language and numeracy learning, comment on the greater engagement with and effectiveness of literacy, language and numeracy learning when it is

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focused on employability. Within the context of developing their personal management and teamwork skills, staff can help learners be more receptive to, for example, taking a literacy qualification. **Strode College**'s employability programme operated within prison workplaces provides an opportunity to win over learners who would not otherwise engage with 'education' to the idea of taking up literacy, language and numeracy classes.

The Skills for Life Manager at **HMPYOI Hindley** talks of the importance of staff developing learners' awareness of the underpinning literacy, language and numeracy skills they are using in the workplace and therefore of the importance of having these skills to perform well at work:

*"The LSP (learning support practitioner) might point out to a learner how they have used good communication skills when serving a customer's dinner. This will help learners to understand how important such skills are for sustained employment. ('How do you think the customer would have felt if you hadn't asked her if she wanted bacon bits on her salad and then listened to the fact she is a vegetarian?')."*

Amina Bodhanian, Skills for Life Manager, **HMPYOI Hindley**

Literacy, language and numeracy teaching and learning must support the employability goal. At **Burleigh College**, language goals are appropriate to the type of employment the learner is looking for. Below is an extract from an individual learning plan.

Learning goals	Activities
Learn five new words a day relating to cleaning or jobsearch	Obtain a list of words and meanings from teacher each day. Write these words and their meanings in a vocabulary book. Learn the five words a day. Teacher will test daily on the previous day's words and weekly on the week's words. Use these words where you are able in classroom activities (speaking and listening and writing).

At Riverside Training, learners develop their functional and employability skills in 'vocationally branded' sessions. For example, a recent session timetabled as 'manual handling', took place in a training room with active use of a SMART board and suite of computers. The session had a range of learning objectives that included manual handling, representing data in a spreadsheet, folder management and team working. Learners could see the point of developing what could otherwise be seen as abstract ICT skills. "I can use a spreadsheet to see how many accidents in the workplace are due to lifting incorrectly and I can see the point in doing that because I would like to work on a construction site!"

Some providers, particularly those working with adults, report that their learners don't need to be sold the importance of improving their literacy, language, numeracy and ICT skills in order to find and keep a job; they are well aware of their importance. The

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provider's role is to support them to improve these skills in an atmosphere of respect and co-operation and to make learning enjoyable. Improving these skills is a powerful boost to learners' self-confidence and self-worth.

### 2.3.5 Active learning

Previous sections have focused on the importance of developing skills in the context of the workplace and vocational learning. This approach requires active, 'on the job' learning approaches with a focus on problem solving and team working and resources that embed employability and literacy, language and numeracy skills learning in a work/vocational context.

At **HMP YOI Hindley** learning happens across the working day. When there are no customers and the kitchen is cleared down, learners can play games/carry out active tasks that continue their learning experiences. Less formal learning activities are more suited to these learners in particular since they are generally very competitive and enjoy doing activities with a competitive edge. Staff have created a problem-solving game, 'Build your Empire', set in a catering context and mapped to the Asset Skills Employability Matrix.

The following resources were frequently listed by providers as effective supports for their delivery. Many are available online, helping to meet the need for flexibility:

- Thinking through maths <http://www.ncetm.org.uk/resources/8848>
- The Teaching and Learning Programme materials (Standards Unit) – particularly the health and safety board game [http://tlp.excellencegateway.org.uk/teachingandlearning/downloads/index\\_lsis.html#](http://tlp.excellencegateway.org.uk/teachingandlearning/downloads/index_lsis.html#)
- LLU+ OLASS numeracy packs
- Skills for Life Materials for Embedded Learning – for example, Get on in the community <http://rwp.qia.oxi.net/embeddedlearning/search.cfm>
- Move On <http://www.move-on.org.uk/>
- BBC RaW - skills for everyday life <http://www.bbc.co.uk/raw/>
- Financial services Authority (FSA) pamphlets e.g. Money made Clear <http://www.moneymadeclear.fsa.gov.uk/home.html>
- Improving learning in mathematics <https://www.ncetm.org.uk/resources/1442>

See appendix 2 for a comprehensive matrix of resources to identify and access those that are appropriate for:

- supporting learners to develop particular employability skills such as maths, problem solving or teamwork
- staff in particular roles.

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### 2.3.6 Supporting learners

All providers place great importance on providing high levels of learner support including regular progress reviews. This leads to high retention rates across all providers.

Riverside Training has two members of staff in all sessions of their Foundation Learning Programme which gives them more time to observe learners and provide one-to-one support.

Learners at **Croydon College** have a review every four weeks. Learners carry out a self-evaluation and receive tutor feedback on each area of the programme. The learner and tutor evaluations are then discussed one to one.

Support into Work staff meet as a team every week and discuss learners' needs and progress, particularly those who have just started and those who are having difficulties. This enables everyone to know all of the learners individually and respond to their needs.

Employability mentors play a key role in supporting learners on **Burleigh College's** employability pilot. They support the learner's pathway to employment both on the course and thereafter through the progression modules on the Employability Plan. They are typically the pastoral staff/employment staff of the college and are funded within the programme which, because of the long-term commitment, has meant shifting some focus of funding from courses from delivery to aftercare. One student records the support she wants from her mentor:

- encourage me throughout this plan
- help me work out any problems that might come up
- provide on-going guidance and counselling
- agree a flexible programme with me and monitor how well I keep to what I have agreed
- check with my language tutor that I am learning the vocabulary for cleaning work

At **Strode College's** prisons, where employability skills are developed in the vocational workshops, the employability tutor meets with the workshop supervisor each week to discuss learner progress. The tutor also meets with each learner for 15 minutes every week. At these sessions, the learner is encouraged to reflect on their performance that week on each target employability skill during that week. They consider what went well, aspects of their work that were not up to standard and areas for improvement.

At **HMP Wolds**, the resettlement team will support offenders to reflect on their newly developed employability skills in CVs and job applications and in preparing for job interviews.

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### 2.4 Progress, achievement and progression

#### 2.4.1 Monitoring and recognising progress

Many of the providers assess ongoing progress and achievement in employability skills against individual targets on an individual learning plan (ILP) drawn from an employability skills framework. This is often based on the Asset Skills Matrix and uses the RARPA approach. (See <http://www.rarpatoolkit.com/en/rarpa.asp>)

Learners are encouraged to monitor their own progress. At Riverside Training, learners are encouraged to take ownership of their progress through the use of posters/large tracking sheets on the walls of workshops and the classrooms. At the end of a session, learners are asked to identify the skills they think they have covered during the session. Learners supported by Strode College self-assess their employability skills at the start of the programme. At the end of the first week, they are expected to re-assess their skills and to compare their assessment with that of their workshop supervisor, identifying areas of strength and areas for improvement.

#### 2.4.2 Recognising achievement

##### Qualifications

Many of the providers' programmes offer vocational, employability *and* literacy, language and numeracy qualifications, recognising the value of qualifications to learners in the job market.

For some, vocational qualifications are the main goal. Several offer vocational qualifications that are relevant to several occupational areas and are therefore particularly valuable to learners who may be undecided about the sort of job they want. These include food hygiene, food safety, customer service, and health and safety.

The majority offer literacy, language and numeracy qualifications and, in some instances, ICT. These include adult literacy and numeracy qualifications at entry and levels 1 and 2; units from the Qualifications and Credit Framework; ESOL qualifications; functional skills in mathematics, English and ICT; ITQ; and Microsoft Digital Literacy at entry level 3. For some of the providers, the literacy, language and numeracy qualifications are the main goal because poor literacy, language or numeracy skills are the main barrier to employment. This is the case, for example, at Burleigh College, where ethnic minority learners lack the language skills needed for the workplace.

Where providers offer employability qualifications, these include:

- Employability and personal development units from a range of awarding bodies, including City & Guilds/AQA and Ascentis
- BTEC Work Skills
- Improving own learning (wider key skills)
- The PEARL qualification developed by Manchester College using the Asset Skills matrix <http://www.qcda.gov.uk/22116.aspx>
- Ready, Steady Work (OCR) <http://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/type/vrq/rsw/index.html>



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- NCFE Employability Skills <http://www.ncfe.org.uk/Default.aspx?id=18343>

Achievement of an employability skills qualification is seen as an important selling point for prisoners at HMP Liverpool. It means that on release, if they are put on to an employability skills programme, the only requirement is to do a work placement, since they have already achieved an employability qualification.

### Non-accredited recognition of achievement

For some providers, lack of funding stops them from offering external accreditation, although they would prefer to do so.

Many providers have in-house certificates.

At **Strode College**, the main goal for learners is achieving the detailed reference they receive on completion that will help them to secure employment on release or within the prison. They are required to achieve an 80% success rate in each of the target skills every week in order to gain the reference. (See case study.)

At **HMP Wolds**, it is intended that the development of employability skills will be linked to prisoners' incentives and privileges and that appropriate behaviour will be rewarded and recorded through the RARPA model. In turn, the RARPA model will provide evidence for the Employment Board when assessing a prisoner's readiness for work.

### 2.4.3 Supporting progression

Many of the providers are working towards job outcomes' targets. These vary depending on the learner group and the nature of the funded programme.

**Exchange Group** and Support into Work are both achieving a job outcome rate of 27%. HMP Liverpool has a target of 20% job outcomes on release. At **HMP Low Newton**, 12% of learners achieve employment on release against a target of 11%.

Some programmes have a target progression rate to employment **or** further training. **Acorn Training** is achieving an 85% success rate against a target of 70%.

The Preparation for Employment course at **HMP Low Newton** works hard with learners to try and ensure they have employment on release. Learners are helped to link with support agencies outside and are supported to identify job opportunities that match their skills and to arrange interview dates on release. The prison follows learners for two months after their release to get feedback on employment outcomes. Advice can be provided over the phone.

A small number of the providers continue to support their learners once they have found a job. **Exchange Group** offers these learners support through Train to Gain and apprenticeships wherever possible and where there are employers who will support this.

**Acorn Training** uses Facebook to maintain links with learners and keep them aware of progression opportunities.

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### Appendix 1: Provider case studies

#### Case Study 1 – Acorn Training

##### **The Steady Shop: a holistic approach to supporting young people to progress**

Acorn Training in Ripley, Derbyshire has been a work-based learning provider for more than 10 years, providing apprenticeships and NVQs as well as a variety of other learning programmes throughout Derbyshire, in Derby City and Nottingham. They specialise in the delivery of programmes for challenging young people including preparation for employment and were one of the first providers in the East Midlands to be awarded the EMSkills quality mark for the service they provide to employers.

The Steady Shop project started in 2009 as a roll-on roll-off programme combining customer service and literacy and numeracy training. The project was prompted by Acorn's introduction of Foundation Learning. Steady Shop was the brain child of Rachel Dickson, the E2E tutor, who felt that the project would support progression into a variety of apprenticeships. The learners themselves had identified that they had problems dealing with customers in an appropriate way and dealing with formal situations; so the Steady Shop was created to help learners improve these skills. The first cohort had an achievement rate of 100% in their level 1 Customer Service Award.

There are between 25 and 40 learners on the programme at any one time. The programme is made up of the following components:

- Customer Service level 1
- Job search and employability skills
- English level 1 or 2
- Maths level 1 or 2
- ICT key skills level 1 or 2
- Employability and personal development
- Health and Safety level 1.



The programme is currently funded by the LSC, soon to be SFA<sup>5</sup>.

#### **Delivery Model**

All learners take an online initial and diagnostic assessment to identify their strengths and areas for development in literacy and numeracy. This determines whether they will take a level 1 or level 2 literacy or numeracy qualification. Observation activities and interviews are used to initially assess learners' employability skills. Progress is captured in a learner portfolio which is assessed throughout and at the end of the programme.

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<sup>5</sup> SFA – Skills Funding Agency

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Learners spend two hours a day, two days a week in the shop working in a range of job roles – for example dealing with complaints, promoting stock, stock control or resource identification. Off-site extension activities are built into the programme and include:

- market research
- observations of real customer environments
- leaflet drops.

Knowledge and skills development is addressed through group work, one-to-one delivery and some e-learning. Activities that take place include:

- role play
- interview practice
- acting as the manager of the shop
- listening to real business experiences
- work placements.

Learners are given the opportunity to progress from the Steady Shop to the Zebra Zone once they've achieved their customer service and literacy and numeracy qualifications. The Zebra Zone is a social enterprise where goods are sold over the Internet on behalf of an individual or an organisation. It was established to support learners who could not access work experience to ensure all learners could access a real-life situation.

One day a week, learners focus on developing their literacy, numeracy, ICT and personal development skills according to individual targets and goals. Literacy, language and numeracy are embedded through one-to-one support and discrete sessions in small groups. Acorn actively uses online learning materials such as Move On<sup>6</sup> and BBC Skillswise.<sup>7</sup>

Teaching and learning activities that develop literacy and numeracy skills include:

- developing marketing materials such as posters
- developing art work using ICT
- planning meetings and agendas according to identified job roles
- drafting letters relating to jobs, stock and customer complaints
- analysing data relating to sales figures obtained through a local market research activity.

Learners have the opportunity to take part in local charity events where funding is raised to support charities such as Children in Need as well as community events where learners take part in different projects such as working for non-profit organisations, and participating in a market survey to improve services in Ripley.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.move-on.org.uk/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/>

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These activities help to improve their teamwork and communication skills and build relationships with the local community.



Learners value the opportunities they are given to develop their confidence. They were asked what specific skills they felt they had developed whilst working in the Steady Shop:

“I have improved my confidence and feel capable of asking questions to deal with queries.”

“I think my customer service skills have improved when dealing with customer complaints.”

“It has given me more confidence to deal with situations I might find in real life.”

### What makes the model effective?

The high levels of retention (93%), achievement (93%) and progression into employment or further training (85%) are all evidence of success. Acorn feels that its model is successful because:

- it provides a fully supportive and safe environment where learners are able to put into practice the knowledge and skills they are developing
- real-life challenges support learners commitment to developing their own English and maths skills
- learners understand what it feels like to manage and take responsibility for themselves
- it is personalised to the needs of the learner. For example, when a learner begins the programme they are asked which job they would like to do. The customer service qualification is then embedded across the chosen area.
- all work placements are monitored and feedback taken from learners and employers to ensure placements are managed effectively as a partnership
- Acorn works with a wide range of partners to add value to their provision. For example:
  - local businesses come and talk to learners about creativity, business enterprise and entrepreneurship
  - Derbyshire police provides sessions on anti-social behaviour and crime prevention.

### Meeting the challenge

- An engaging curriculum that has a strong focus on teamworking supports learners from a range of socio-economic backgrounds to develop self-respect and respect for others.
- All learners are supported, engaged and motivated to learn and progress resulting in high levels of achievement and progression.
- The flexible, learner-centred approach supports engagement and retention; learners are allowed time off if necessary. Support is also extended to families: for example one learner whose family were struggling to pay for their food and

## Skills for Life Support Programme

household bills were invited to the centre to access support in claiming for child benefits. This enabled the learner to stay on the programme.

### **Acorn's top tips for effective employability provision**

- Ensure staff are qualified and experienced in this area of work.
- Ensure staff have an empathy with young people and are free of stereotypical perceptions of young people.
- Ensure staff have the skills to support the development of literacy and numeracy.
- Embed literacy and numeracy development where these skills naturally occur and select a theme that your learners will be interested in.

### Case study 2 – Bedford Training Group Ltd

#### A taste of learning, a chance of work



Bedford Training Group Ltd (BTG) is a work-based learning provider with charitable status. Emerging from Group Training Association (GTA) in 1982, it has always provided apprenticeships and vocational training to meet the needs of industry. By recruiting teaching, assessing and management staff from industry backgrounds, it has helped to keep its profile as an employer-focused organisation that has great credibility when offering employability programmes.

Based in Bedford, BTG provides E2E opportunities, off-the-job training and unemployed apprenticeships. The Chief Executive, Alan Gildersleve, himself an engineer, leads on employability work because he feels it is a key part of his remit to encourage young people into industry and to show a pride in passing on the skills of his trade.

#### The model

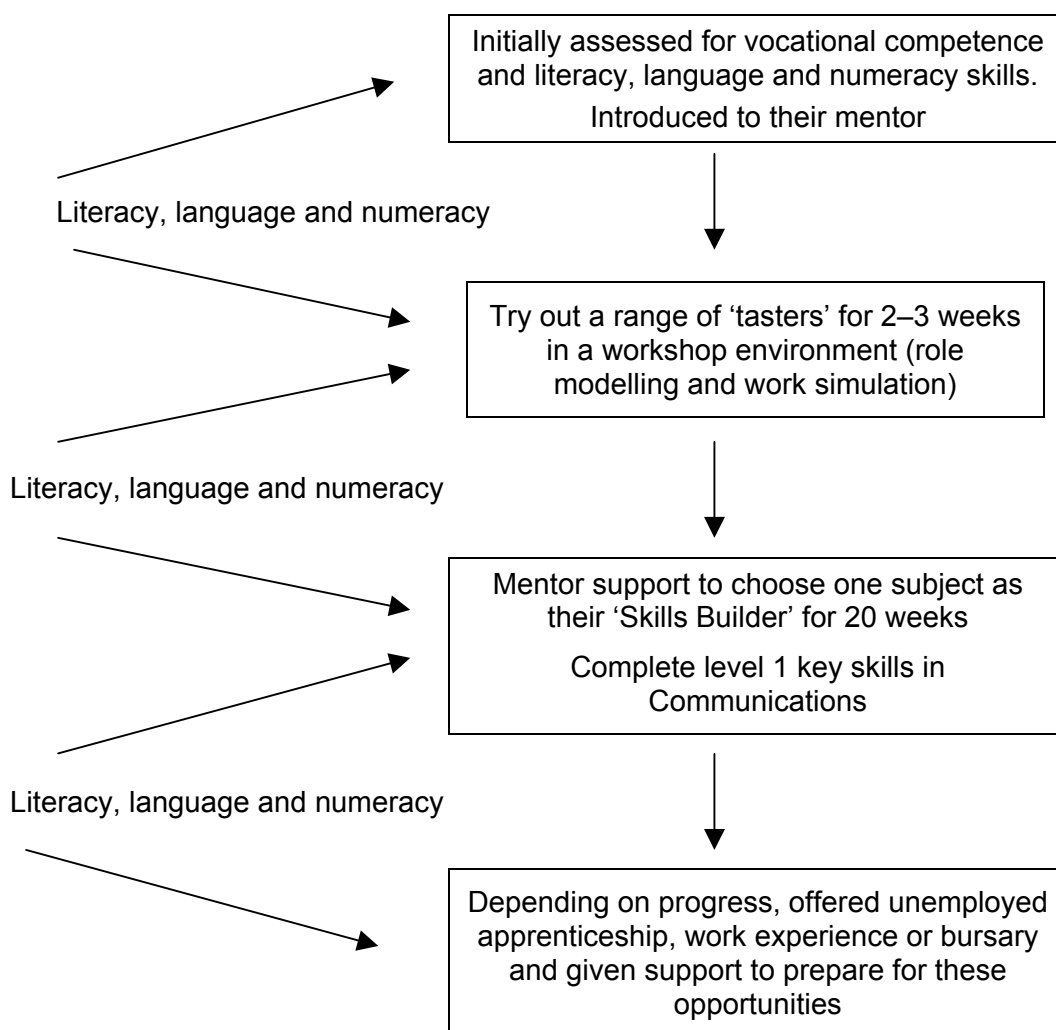
The LSC funds BTG's E2E provision for 97 learners in the Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes area. BTG has three centres across the area which were chosen to reflect the skills needed locally in motor vehicle, construction and engineering manufacture. This is supported by a holistic model of delivery that takes an unemployed learner through training and qualifications to work placements and/or apprenticeships. Part of the success of this model is that it offers unemployed learners 'tasters' so that they can try out a range of skills.

BTG also places key skills in Communications (level 1) at the heart of the learning as this is seen as fundamental to the success of learners both on the E2E programme and in work. By emphasising key skills early in the vocational learning experience for all learners, BTG has achieved a 96% success rate; many unemployed learners will be looking at employment opportunities in very small businesses such as independent local garages where they will be required to do everything from answering the phone to filling in MOT records.

Learners are offered tasters in all subject areas, initially for a couple of days for each area, and then choose the one that interests them most. As an important part of the model, it helps the learners to see the range of trades available and gives them a wider understanding of the industry, especially helpful for learners who don't really know what they want to do. Also it helps to keep them engaged and motivated rather than defensive. Throughout their programme, learners have an E2E mentor to support their vocational and literacy, language and numeracy learning as well as giving them opportunities to talk about external issues which might be affecting their ability to gain work.

## Skills for Life Support Programme

### The BTG Model for E2E



### What works well?

As well as offering a delivery model that engages the learners in a subject of their choice, BTG places great importance on a practical approach that embeds theoretical learning. This integrated method is much more effective than separating out skills and knowledge since it helps to motivate learners who have had negative learning experiences and who have expressed a preference to work with their hands. It also means that opportunities to deliver language, literacy and numeracy occur naturally as well as providing opportunities to teach employment-focused elements such as timekeeping, attitude, record-keeping, health and safety and working with others.



## Skills for Life Support Programme

BTG identifies several factors fundamental to its success:

- The expertise of their staff who have worked in the industry and can offer positive role models to unemployed learners
- Their relationship with employers which is built on an understanding of the technical and employability needs of the industry
- Flexibility of delivery models and approaches which meets the needs of both the learners and prospective employers
- A combination of a skills' assessment to test vocational aptitude combined with an initial assessment of literacy, language and numeracy needs to ensure learners are on the right course with the right support
- The expectation that all E2E learners and unemployed apprentices will gain a minimum of level 1 key skills in Communications
- The Board of Governors are all employers who have links with small, medium and large employers to ensure that BTG stays up to date with industry needs and there are positive links with potential employers
- Choice of geographical location: the delivery centres are within easy reach of public transport and BTG offers a free minibus pick-up for learners who are outside this transport network.

BTG places great emphasis on being credible with both learners and prospective employers based on its knowledge of what it is like to work industry – from establishing a learning environment in their workshops which replicates the daily routine of work through to tailoring the delivery of learning to address changes in industry standards. An approach that is employment-focused means that trainers act as role models for unemployed learners so that they can 'learn' how to be employed and can answer questions about work from a position of having "been there, seen it, got the overalls".

### Case study 3 – Blackpool Adult and Community Learning

#### Providing opportunities for local communities to support employability

Blackpool Adult and Community Learning (BACL) provides extensive community learning opportunities across the town and in accessible locations. Programmes include those courses traditionally seen as part of community learning, for example – yoga, dancing or genealogy. Family learning includes family literacy and numeracy provision, intergenerational family learning and parenting skills. In addition, supporting the employability of Blackpool is an important part of BACL provision.

BACL believes that strong partnerships, local access, flexibility of approach and developing the individual needs of learners are crucial to supporting employability for many communities in Blackpool. Using money from the Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities fund, BACL is reaching hundreds of learners who are taking advantage of opportunities to develop the skills, knowledge and dispositions which will support them into employment.

BACL employability programmes and employability readiness programmes are directed at supporting the most vulnerable people in the areas it serves. Working with partners Job Centre Plus, Positive Steps Programmes, The Salvation Army, local community development agencies, libraries; schools and children's centres and Blackpool and the Fylde College, BACL is meeting the needs of people who might find it difficult to join classes which are not on their doorstep. Many learners on the service's employability programmes are experiencing or have experienced some difficulties in life. These can include, substance dependency issues, being homeless, having fears and phobias, low self-esteem and feelings of worthlessness. Alongside these issues, learners also lack confidence in their English and maths skills, using new technologies and a general feeling of not being ready for work.

In 2007 the Index of Multiple Deprivation placed Blackpool as the 12th most deprived local authority in England. It is against this background that BACL is offering accredited employability programmes, designed to meet individual learner and employer needs.

Learners can choose from modules which include:

- Ascentis Certificate in personal and professional development
- AQA short modules in, for example, how to use the internet, searching the internet for accommodation, how to write a formal/informal letter and introduction to word processing.

Local community development agencies, such as the Salvation Army, are looking to develop people to support them in gaining work experience as volunteers, in the first instance, before moving on to employment. The agencies want their volunteers to have the opportunity to develop their literacy, language and numeracy skills alongside other employability skills. Therefore BACL decided to embed literacy, language and numeracy into all their programmes as a way of best meeting the needs of learners and their partner agencies.

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BACL is very clear and 'upfront' about the embedding of literacy, language and numeracy into their programmes. They encourage learners to see the benefits of improving and developing these skills as a means of supporting them into employment rather than as an end in themselves. The service believes that their learners on employability courses would not, initially, want to develop their literacy, language and numeracy skills in an environment without a meaningful context.

*"Seeing a purpose and developing both sets of skills simultaneously, makes a difference to learners' motivations to engage with literacy, language and numeracy."*

Lynn Howarth, Quality and Curriculum Development Manager Adult and Community Learning, Blackpool Council.

BACL has a team of experienced and supportive tutors delivering its employability programmes who believe that learners need skilful approaches to engage and retain them. The team of tutors undertook a programme of CPD, supported by the LSIS Skills for Life Support Programme (SfLSP), in understanding and implementing an embedded approach to employability and literacy, language and numeracy skills development. Tutors had the opportunity to devise schemes of work and session plans which they felt comfortable with and which reflected the work actually going on in the sessions. Employability tutors, some of whom are specialist literacy, language and numeracy teachers, shared their skills in developing the literacy, language and numeracy needed by learners to succeed on the employability programmes.

*"Being able to come together with other tutors through the SfLSP and share our experiences and approaches and learn from one another has given me the confidence to support my learners in developing their literacy, language and numeracy skills. I now feel better able to 'sell' literacy, language and numeracy to my learners because I can see the value of it myself. I know this works."*

Employability tutor, Adult and Community Learning, Blackpool Council

*"I used to get caught up in core-curriculum referencing on my lesson plan. Now, I look at the literacy, language and numeracy skills my learners need to succeed in the work we're doing in the session and I concentrate on supporting them to develop these skills. The referencing comes second!"*

Employability tutor, Adult and Community Learning, Blackpool Council

There have been challenges in developing an embedded approach to literacy, language and numeracy within employability programmes.

The service has had to seek funding to carry out this valuable work; it takes time and money to make changes to teaching and learning and to continue to support those changes and avoid embedding being seen as a 'flavour of the month' approach. The funding and support from the SfLSP has enabled BACL to work with staff to identify which modules would best meet the needs of learners. They could then find an approach to embedding which tutors could understand, work with and use, and come together to share experiences and decide what more is needed.

Overcoming social and educational barriers of learners to help them to engage with literacy, language and numeracy, even when embedded, has taken sustained and planned approaches. Community organisations who have worked with the service for

## Skills for Life Support Programme

a number of years have seen the value of engaging learners through employability are supportive and keen to work with BACL. By working with community organisations the service believes it can maximise the support it can give to learners to develop their employability and literacy, language and numeracy skills with a limited number of specialist literacy, language and numeracy staff.

BACL believes that locating programmes as close to learners as possible is a key element in learner success. Equally important is awareness-raising training with external agencies and their own staff who can now see the benefits of an embedded approach to literacy, language and numeracy. Thirdly, understanding the local communities and their contrasting needs within which the service works means that a 'one size fits all' approach is not an option if the learner is to be kept at the centre of the programme.

### Contact details

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### Case Study 4 – BCHA

#### Supporting New Deal

Bournemouth-based housing and social care support provider BCHA offers a range of programmes including New Deal. The organisation won the 'Contribution to Housing and Education' award at the 2009 UK Housing Awards.

Working with New Deal Dorset under contract from Job Centre Plus, BCHA delivers 13 and 26 week programmes to clients who are over 18, have been unemployed for six months and are receiving Job Seekers Allowance. They currently have about 80 clients on the programme, with a consortium job outcome rate above the national average.

Clients are referred by Job Centre Plus to BCHA for interview. If clients refuse to come on the programme or to look for work, they lose their Job Seekers Allowance. The funding mechanism depends on numbers attending per week and successfully meeting job-outcome targets. Learners on the main New Deal strand attend for 30 hours a week over five days, comprising 24 hours work experience and six hours for job search.

BCHA's main concern is the 'revolving door syndrome' where learners go round and round the system. BCHA aims to remove barriers that can prevent a client finding and keeping work such as dealing with debt or health issues that impact on a client's ability to attend and concentrate at interviews. Housing advice is also important; if a client is in danger of losing their home he or she is less likely to keep the placement, either because the client moves away or because they cannot concentrate at work.

Clients deemed by Job Centre Plus to need literacy, language or numeracy support do not need to have work experience, but BCHA aims to provide them with 12 hours' work experience per week to make them more employable. Work experience has two major benefits: it provides a context for the literacy, language or numeracy learnt in group sessions; and it enables clients to practise their new skills in the workplace.

BCHA managers keep their eye on the job market, using various statistical sites such as the SW Labour Market Bulletin compiled by Job Centre Plus. This covers trends and types of job vacancies and the numbers of clients seeking work. Clients are advised on suitable placements which offer the best chance of leading to sustainable employment.

To place clients with employers, BCHA offers a range of incentives such as 13 weeks of unpaid employment for learners with support, advice on subsidies and funding, information about Train to Gain, "try before you buy" trials of employees, and reassurance for employers that if the client is not appropriate he or she can be moved on. The aim is not to overburden the employer with extra work. BCHA carries out the first client interview and sends details to a matched employer; they then call the employer to reaffirm suitability and cover any concerns before an interview with the

## Skills for Life Support Programme

employer is arranged. Once the client has found a suitable placement, BCHA continues to be involved and provide support. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, they keep the employer informed of a client's success once they have left the work placement in recognition of the role the employer has played in helping the client into employment.

BCHA has built up good relationships with organisations that can offer placements for clients with particular needs. For example, a female client with low levels of literacy and numeracy skills, mild mental health issues, and low confidence attended the programme twice and was then placed in a charity shop. Unable to meet the attendance criteria, she was removed from New Deal but continued to volunteer and later Job Centre Plus transferred her on to incapacity benefit. She has continued to volunteer with the charity shop. This means she benefits from the stability and routine the shop offers, and the charity benefits from a committed volunteer.

Clients are encouraged to work on their literacy, language and numeracy skills. This leads to a reduction in errors at work, better efficiency and, if redundancies occur again, better prospects to remain in employment or get a new job: most clients don't want to be unemployed.

Clients prefer to learn on line at their own pace using sites like Move On and BBC Skillswise. BCHA are embedding more literacy and numeracy into job search and BCHA staff have attended SfLSP training on 'Promoting active learning' and 'Using resources effectively to embed literacy, language and numeracy'. Although the Job Centre Plus programme can only fund one Skills for Life qualification at one level, BCHA advises employers and clients that the client can continue training after they get a job. BCHA also provides information about other SfL training opportunities as well as their own provision.

The views of the client, employer and staff are sought and analysed, with a quarterly evaluation of client views plus individual monthly reviews. The latest quarterly review of clients showed 87% felt more employable because of the programme; 81% said they had gained confidence and 97% received the support they needed.

The key challenges BCHA faces in developing their employability skills provision:

- The constraints in the system: some clients need more or less time but they have to attend for either 13 or 26 weeks and take only one SfL qualification. Some
- Learners need a flexible approach to attendance with time off for illness or personal problems.
- BCHA is contracted to meet demand: new clients can start at any time, which makes planning difficult. After a dedicated induction the new client is moved into a group which can sometimes have an unsettling effect on the rest of the group, creating additional issues for the tutor. Ideally more time is needed to get and train new staff to meet this increased demand.

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- Lack of jobs: one client wrote in the quarterly evaluation: “It really gets me down when I come in and it’s the same jobs and there are not enough jobs. All I want is WORK thank You.” Sometimes, there is a need to alter clients’ perception of acceptable work and focus on transferable skills.
- An increase in adults with low literacy, language and numeracy skills: BCHA has seen an increase in entry level 1 learners, and the last quarterly review showed 41% of learners have assessed for themselves they have a learning difficulty or a disability.
- More clients with special needs are being put on Job Seekers Allowance: this means placements need to be diversified and closer contact kept with Job Centre Plus. Some clients whose skills are below entry level 1 are in desperate need of additional support to help them focus on the basics and work through logical steps towards employment.

Going forward, BCHA has obtained Lottery funding for a new programme called Ignite, which will run over three years and aims to involve 180 clients per year. The programme will enable BCHA to do what is difficult to achieve within the constraints of New Deal, that is, build clients’ self-esteem and skills so they are more work-ready. Clients will receive tailored support using a range of agencies where this is in the client’s best interest. Each client will have a named person for continuity and a personal, flexible programme; it will be advice and guidance with delivery.

BCHA’s top tips for effective employability provision are:

- meet client’s basic needs for shelter, food and health within the constraints of the contract
- support staff and employers to deal with difficult clients by developing sound processes which provide evidence to remove time wasters and therefore release more time to support committed clients
- collect and analyse data about the job market and use it to select suitable placements.

BCHA would like to see more flexibility within New Deal. It is heavily focused on job outcomes, which is not always in the best interest of the individual. Living skills are fundamental to sustainable employment. Help someone to budget, find a home and access medical care before they move back to work, or they will soon be back through the revolving door making it ever harder to break free from the system and move towards employment and independent living.

### Case Study 5 – Burleigh College, West London

#### Developing supported employment pathways for parents with language barriers

Burleigh College is a private training college, primarily offering business and English language courses. As part of an LSC pilot running from April 2009 to March 2011, the college has developed supported employment pathways for parents for whom English language difficulties are a barrier to employment. To date 278 learners have been recruited, all in receipt of one or more of Job Seekers Allowance (JSA), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Income Support, Child Tax Credits, Carers Allowance or as partners of a parent in receipt of such benefits or allowances.

Learners are recruited:

- through outreach recruitment at Job Centre Plus
- from other programmes offered at the college or in children's centres
- through word of mouth
- from the previous client base
- through ALMOs ( Arms Length Management Organisations<sup>8</sup>)
- through leafleting and advertisement.

Funding is triggered by the number of learner starts, sustained job outcomes where learners work for eight hours or more for at least 13 weeks, and by quarterly evaluation reports.

The programme runs for 15 hours per week on a weekly roll-on roll-off basis. Delivery is one to one and in small groups. While a defined scheme of work gives structure to the programme and enables staff to accommodate new starters each week, the programme is delivered flexibly to meet individual learner's needs.

#### Designing a programme that helps to overcome significant barriers to employment

Manjula<sup>9</sup> joined the programme in June 2009. She wants to work as a cleaner. The particular barriers to employment of this learner group are highlighted by this extract from her initial information, advice and guidance (IAG) session:

*“Barriers to getting the job I want*

- 1. Very limited spoken and written English*
- 2. Health issues*
- 3. Family issues make learning difficult*
- 4. No work experience in this country*
- 5. Lack of cleaning, health and safety and job search vocabulary*
- 6. Very limited knowledge of how to apply for and seek work.”*

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<sup>8</sup> Responsible for council house management

<sup>9</sup> Not her real name



## Skills for Life Support Programme

The programme has been designed to address the following key employability skills needs of learners like Manjula:

- language skills in the context of the working environment
- time-management skills: getting used to a structure of attendance and time keeping
- organisational skills: arranging family commitments around work and to support them to find work that fits in with their family commitments.

Manjula's individualised programme has the following goals:

1. Achieve entry level 1 in spoken English within 12 weeks\* with particular emphasis on listening skills
2. Achieve entry level 1 in reading and writing within 16 weeks\*
3. Develop language skills in the context of work with added vocabulary on cleaning and health and safety
4. Agree a flexible programme that it is monitored closely and kept to
5. Seek a work placement in the voluntary sector with a supportive employer (to be started within eight weeks)
6. Learn how to use other methods of looking for work such as cleaning agencies, newspapers or the internet.

*\*Duration dictated by the programme framework*

To meet the needs of its learners, Burleigh's provision places a high priority on partnership working and flexibility to ensure that it remains learner-centred.

### Flexibility

The programme accommodates learners' parental responsibilities. Courses run during school hours and where there are childcare problems, learners are not expected to attend during school holidays. This flexibility means learners can come back to the programme after holidays and other necessary absences (on other programmes learners may have to be removed and restart). While reasonable and achievable attendance requirements are agreed with learners, they are encouraged to keep to this agreement within a culture of high expectations of attendance and punctuality linked to employers' expectations.

### Partnership working

The programme requires a high level of collaborative working between:

- the language teacher
- external IAG staff from Prospects, a provider of IAG in West London which is financed through a different funding stream. Staff see learners up to four times, about once every six weeks as an integral part of the programme. The outcomes of these sessions feed into the employability plan.
- the employability mentor or 'Routeway broker'

*"Routeway brokers or employability mentors are seen by the LSC as linking provision and addressing the 'revolving door' syndrome. They support the learner's pathway to employment both on the course and thereafter through the progression modules which are planned on the employability plan. They are*

## Skills for Life Support Programme

*members of the college staff and are typically the pastoral staff/employment staff. They are funded within the programme which, because of the long-term commitment, has meant shifting some focus of funding from course delivery to aftercare. Our Routeway brokers are combining their work with working towards an NVQ Level 3 qualification in IAG.”*

Davis Stevenson, Manager, Burleigh College

Following initial assessment to confirm eligibility for the programme, learners' language, numeracy and **employability and soft skills** are diagnostically assessed to inform the combined **individual employment plan and individual learning plan**, which is agreed by the language teacher, the employability mentor and the IAG staff. Although numeracy teaching is not a funded part of the programme, numeracy needs identified are met and learners have the opportunity to achieve a numeracy qualification to enhance their employment prospects.

The employability mentor's role is to support the learner to achieve the goals laid out in the individual employment plan. During her initial IAG session, Manjula records:

*“This is how I want my mentor to be involved with me throughout this plan:*

- *Encourage me throughout this plan*
- *Help me work out any problems that might come up*
- *Provide on-going guidance and counselling*
- *Agree a flexible programme with me and monitor how well I keep to what I have agreed*
- *Check with my language tutor that I am learning the vocabulary for cleaning work.”*

Language goals are contextualised to the workplace. On the next page is an extract from Manjula's individual learning plan.

Burleigh has found the following teaching and learning resources effective for this learner group:

- citizenship materials
- games, hot potato etc
- sector-specific learning materials
- E2E learning materials.

Progress is reviewed every three weeks by the language teacher and the employability mentor. A trained support worker is on hand to provide pastoral and other support learners may need. There is an exit review which leads to the next intervention supported and facilitated by the mentor. This process is repeated for each intervention until the learner finds employment or funding ceases. See **individual employment plan and individual learning plan**.

## Skills for Life Support Programme

Learning Goals	Activities
Learn five new words a day relating to cleaning or jobsearch	Obtain list of words and meanings from teacher each day Write these words and their meanings in a vocabulary book Learn the five words a day Teacher will test daily on the previous day's words and weekly on the week's words Use these words where you are able in classroom activities (speaking and listening and writing)
Talk about yourself to the class using new vocabulary particularly in relation to the cleaning job you want	Prepare a two-minute talk about yourself and work as a cleaner Use some of the new words you have learnt Practise your talk with your teacher and listen to her suggestions Practise parts of your talk that your teacher says could be improved Give your talk to the class and answer questions from them

### Meeting local employment needs

There are local employment opportunities in childcare, school support work, retail, hospitality, food manufacturing and care. Programmes are delivered and designed with this in mind. Care agencies and school support agencies inform the programme by providing details of client personal and professional skills required, which are delivered on the programme. CRB checks are carried out at an early stage of the programme so that learners can quickly take up employment in workplaces where this is a requirement. Links with employment agencies help the college to source the part-time jobs that fit in with their learners' childcare responsibilities. Programme funding allows for uniforms to be purchased for learners accessing work.

### Work placements

Learners undertake supervised work placements in adult and child care, retail, school meals, schools escort services and administration. One of the goals on

Manjula's employability plan is to:

*"Undertake a work placement and keep to attendance and time keeping agreed for that placement. Obtain a reference. Try to communicate in English on placement wherever possible. This placement can be for 1 or 2 days a week and I will attend College on the other days."*

Learners typically undertake 10 hours placement work per week for four hours. The college emphasises the value of work placement as a means of practising the English skills acquired in college. Work placements are effective where:

- there is a match between the learner's employment goal and their placement
- the client is well prepared and supported during the placement
- employers are prepared to spend time investing in the learner
- employers give placement workers responsibility and treat them as permanent members of staff.

## Skills for Life Support Programme

### Measuring the success of the programme

The programme has a retention rate of 82%: 21% of learners progress into employment, against a target of 20% (10% full-time and 10% part-time); 60% of learners achieve a Skills for life qualification against a target of 50%; and 45% of the learners go on to further study on completing the course.

### Challenges

The main challenges arise from Burleigh's aim to be flexible and learner-centred to accommodate individual's circumstances, whilst ensuring that individuals attend to an agreed schedule and develop the time-management and organisational skills needed to be employable. There are also the challenges of co-ordinating the vital role played by external IAG staff at Prospects and training the Routeway brokers to look beyond short-term employment outcomes to developing long-term employment pathways for the learners beyond the end of the programme.

### Burleigh's top tips for effective employability skills provision

- Recognise that employability skills can be delivered as part of an ESOL provision in generic and sector-specific contexts
- Make the learning fun and interactive
- Include a work-placement element
- Make sure learning goals identified through assessment are expressed and developed in an employability context (sector-specific where appropriate)
- Make sure your employability teachers have:
  - empathy with unemployed learners
  - motivational skills
  - the ability to break down a lengthy pathway into manageable chunks to motivate learners to achieve.

### Case study 6 – Croydon College

#### Motivate to change

#### About Croydon College

Croydon College, in South London, is one of the largest further education colleges in the South East. It has over 13,000 full and part-time students on further or higher education programmes. The college comprises three institutions: Croydon Sixth Form College, Croydon Skills and Enterprise College, and Croydon Higher Education College.



Sarah Horsley is the Entry to Employment (e2e) Lecturer responsible for the college's Employability and Personal Development Programme.

#### Employability and Personal Development Programme

The Employability and Personal Development Programme was the College's e2e offer. The flexible programme has achieved such success with 85 hard-to-reach learners who were not in employment, education or training (NEET) that the College will now continue to offer it as part of Foundation Learning. Learners achieve the City & Guilds Award or Certificate in Employability and Personal Development through a blended and active learning approach. They can also complete vocational qualifications in hair, beauty, construction, ICT and food and drink, alongside adult literacy and numeracy qualifications.

#### Meeting the needs of learners

The 22-week programme delivers innovative ways of teaching:

- personal development for learning and work
- career planning and job searching
- rights and responsibilities in life and work.

Interactive and motivational activities see learners setting up their own recruitment agency, running discussions and learning problem solving. The emphasis is on experiential learning. Learners are offered a mix of group work, one-to-one sessions, a breakfast club, self-study with a workbook, visiting lecturers and reviews every month.

## Skills for Life Support Programme

*“Our model of personal tutoring supports learners and this is what makes a difference. Our approach is authoritative yet warm, so these vulnerable young people can make a fresh start. The active learning approach and learner-led activities are empowering. We introduce them to a concept or idea such as the ‘Heroes and Heroines PowerPoint’ and they take it from there. They find things out for themselves and cascade information to each other.”*

Sarah Horsley, e2e Lecturer

The wider picture relating to employers’ skills gaps and needs are explained to learners on their induction with the ‘What Employers Want’ presentation. All the activities are set in the context of skills for employability.

*“We explain that employers want people with qualifications, English and maths skills, as well as ‘soft skills’ like independent thinking and flexibility.”*

Sarah Horsley

### **Effective work experience**

The vocational courses have a realistic work environment in the college’s own hair and beauty salon and restaurant and bar. These are used by members of the public who pay for the services.

### **Embedding literacy, language and numeracy**

Literacy, language and numeracy are embedded in materials that teachers use in the vocational areas as well as in the employability activities. All the materials, taken from the LSIS Skills for Life Support Programme or from commercially produced workbooks, are adapted to make them accessible to the client group.

*“My approach to embedding has changed. Previously Skills for Life content was fully embedded and now I make the English, maths and ICT more explicit. I explain to learners the importance of speaking clearly and that they have to improve their writing. I encourage them to use a dictionary, for example.”*

Sarah Horsley

### **Evidence of success**

Retention and achievement rates are high, both at 97%. It has been noted by the college that the second cohort of learners who joined in February shows more maturity and has greater rates of success.

*“We realised that this cohort includes the young people who are more open to learning. They have tried to go to work, realised they don’t have a qualification and come to College to get help.”*

Sarah Horsley

### **Challenges**

The two key challenges identified by the e2e Lecturer are:

- working with a difficult and demanding client group
- restrictions on budgets that make it hard to produce high-quality and innovative resources.

## Skills for Life Support Programme

These challenges are met by:

- offering staff counselling training to respond to learners' needs
- a willingness from staff to create resources in their own time.

### Lessons learnt

Sarah Horsley's top tips for other providers include:

- visit other providers to find out, and share, good practice
- work collaboratively with other tutors and teachers of SfL and vocational programmes to develop shared schemes of work and adapt resources
- build in development time for the teaching teams to hold planning meetings and attend continuing professional development (CPD).

*"I would also recommend buying in some resources and teaching materials, even if you adapt them for your learners. It will save time in the long run."*

### Case Study 7 – Exchange Group

Exchange Group is a large, grade two, national skills and employability provider. The organisation has a network of training centres and e-learning services for businesses and individuals. The company runs Learndirect centres in libraries. It offers Train to Gain, apprenticeships, National Vocational Qualifications and literacy, language and numeracy programmes as well as a recruitment service and tailored training. Emma Warren is their Head of Employability.

The company runs its own innovative campaign for learning called ‘Skill Bill’, designed to engage adults in learning.



#### Response to Redundancy

Response to Redundancy is Exchange Group’s employability programme, offered to people who have been made redundant. LSC-funded, the roll-on roll-off, blended learning programme offers 900 learners a menu of short courses covering:

- business administration
- customer service
- IT entry levels and levels 1 and 2
- management
- personal development including: how to learn, self-development, interpersonal skills, managing stress and time-management
- retail
- Skills for Life (literacy, language and numeracy)
- team leading.

#### Meeting the needs of learners

*“Our offer is a mix of vocationally specific and generic courses that can be used across sectors, covering, for example, customer service and management. We also offer training in the personal skills of time-management, team working and IT. Many of the courses are for as little as three to six hours, which attract busy and also reluctant learners to give it a try. Nearly half our learners will go on to do more than 45 guided learning hours once they have built their confidence.”*

Emma Warren, Head of Employability.

Learners have one-to-one tutor support or group sessions and use e-learning packages as well. Interactive and customised materials engage learners in a personalised programme which suits their level, e.g. **Interviews - body language cards**. The in-house **employability questionnaire** identifies learners’ personal development areas at the outset.



## Skills for Life Support Programme

### Working with employers

Employers have been involved in the design of the Response to Redundancy programme defining what the skills gaps were in their workforce and what the skills needs were for the future. Partnership work with employers has identified an opportunity for care sector training in Leicester. Effective employer partnerships are established through careful listening to match employers' needs with a tailored offer.

### Using local labour market information

*"We look for significant indicators about business sectors. Our Wolverhampton centre has just introduced call centre pre-employment courses. Labour market information shows this is an expanding sector with real job vacancies in the West Midlands."*

Emma Warren

### Embedding Skills for Life

Skills for Life are made meaningful by putting them into context so that learners see how they are vital to getting and keeping a job. The company's Skills for Life co-ordinator has designed a series of literacy and numeracy level 1 and level 2 workbooks as part of Exchange Group's involvement in the LSIS Skills for Life Support Programme this year. These have Skills for Life embedded into employability activities.

### Evidence of success

The model is effective because it promotes learner choice. The building blocks of short courses can be combined to create longer programmes once learners gain confidence. The offer includes e-learning but has face to face support to keep learners on track.

Figures show that 80% of learners achieve and 30% of these go into further learning. There is an 80% retention rate with 27% of learners going into jobs (out of a target of 35%).

### Challenges

The three key challenges identified by the Head of Employability are:

- identifying learners needs and personalising their learning
- being selective in identifying the right learning content for the course
- selecting the right courses to include to match local skills' needs

These challenges are met through:

- listening to learners
- extensive research to find and adapt teaching and learning materials
- identifying industries where people have aspirations of working and also providing generic options, e.g. for customer service.

### Lessons learnt

Emma Warren's top tips for other providers focus on tailoring the employability offer very carefully to clients' needs. She says: "Make the offer flexible and short; link it to real jobs and local industries."

### Case Study 8 – HMP Low Newton

#### Using local knowledge and links with employers to enhance employability provision

HMP Low Newton is a Category A prison for female adults, juveniles and young offenders in County Durham. Education is funded by The Manchester College, which employs Graham Meads to teach the Preparation for Employment course. Their roll-on roll-off three-week course is made up of the BTEC Work Skills (level 1) and the Key Skills Improving Own Learning and Performance (level 1). Some learners also access food hygiene and adult literacy and numeracy tests. The course attracts a weekly total of between eight and ten learners and there is a steady flow of new learners averaging three each week. There are approximately 300 achievements across the two qualifications each year.

The course is popular and the learners are recruited through induction, during sentence planning and through taster sessions. Learners have influenced the fine tuning of the course through constant evaluation. The course is set out as follows:

- Introduction
- Search for a job includes describing a range of job sources, researching and matching jobs and knowing the language of jobs
- Applying for a job includes completing application forms, personal qualities and skills activities, CVs, covering letters, disclosure letters and researching job advertisements
- Preparing for an interview includes mock job interviews with partner employers and the Independent Monitoring Board. This part of the course also includes the relevant and realistic Home Detention Curfew (tagging) interviews with prison staff (this has been highlighted by Ofsted as an example of good practice). Achieving HDC status is an important goal for the learners but, in working towards this goal, they are developing skills that are transferable to job interviews on release
- Interview skills includes taking part in a role play one-to-one interview, gaining positive feedback and developing personal confidence.

#### Making the most of local employers

Graham uses material from the local Job Centre and accesses advertisements and real job opportunities in the local area. The prison has good links with Business in the Community, and local employers visit the prison to deliver presentations about demonstrating positive attitudes and behaviours, working with others, problem solving, preparing for interview, presentation skills and work opportunities.

Local employers play an important role in supporting the team and add value and credibility to the course. Participating employers include Greggs, Asda, Eversheds, Thompson Builders, the Army, Acumen Trust and Marriott hotels. Nextstep North East have recently acquired some funding to work inside the prison and will have the responsibility for making referrals to work, education and the Preparation for Employment course.

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Learners have work experience opportunities in the laundry, kitchens, gardens, BICS<sup>10</sup> (industrial cleaning) and gym where they can experience real employment tasks, have to adhere to timetable, wear appropriate personal protective equipment and conform to current health and safety requirements.

### Innovative delivery

The location of the course is key to its success. It is delivered in a stand-alone training room away from the main buildings with no bars on the windows and no officers present. There are computers in booths in the room containing displays from employers and agencies that promote recruitment. Graham uses a variety of teaching and learning approaches including:

- group work and individual work
- one-to-one work with mentors who are prior learners acting as ambassadors for the course
- team-building activities
- setting own targets
- the effective use of the interactive whiteboard
- differentiated tasks and materials
- role play, speaking and listening activities
- active learning approaches and opportunities to develop IT skills.

Literacy, language and numeracy skills are embedded throughout the course. For example, preparing for interviews involves getting there, reading timetables, maps, using public transport and communicating effectively. Graham also uses a personalised approach with opportunities for individual choice and creativity through the development of a personal progress file. Some learners attend the course during the earlier part of their sentence but return again closer to the time of release to refresh their skills, apply for jobs, write application letters and make contact with prospective employers. This activity is supported by Denis Crompton, Labour Allocations Officer (Employer Engagement).

### Evidence of success

Learners who start the course usually stay on it, so retention is high. If learners leave before the end of the course, it is because they have been released earlier than expected.

*"I think the course is a great programme for people who want to change and gain employment. The tutor is helpful and supportive and makes learning fun."*

Learner

Prison staff track their learners for two months after release to get feedback about job outcomes. Between April 2009 and January 2010, the job outcomes target of

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<sup>10</sup> British Institute of Cleaning Science

## Skills for Life Support Programme

11% of learners released gaining employment was exceeded with a 12% achievement.

### Challenges

- Getting employers on board has been a real challenge. This has meant staff spending time and effort to engage local employers often leading to success. There are also the obstacles of enhanced CRB<sup>11</sup> checks and other clearance protocols for visitors to overcome which requires time and patience.
- Recruitment to the course has been improved by greater links with staff carrying out induction, sentence planning, bridging between courses, such as hairdressing and BICS, the development of taster sessions and the buddying system. The Head of Learning and Skills works hard to raise awareness of the value of the Preparation for Employment course amongst all staff.
- There are conflicting demands on learners' time, offender management requirements and personal health issues. Learners' appointments such as health care, visits, drug programmes or anger management all have to be managed effectively.
- High-risk prisoners cannot access the course because of the location and security requirements for containing this group of learners.

### Top tips

- Design an interactive programme and make it realistic and relevant
- Having a safe learning environment is crucial
- Work hard to engage employers as this makes the course real and creates real opportunities for learners
- Embed literacy, language and numeracy into all activities and talk openly to the learners about the value of these transferable skills.

### Recommendations

- Make employer engagement a national priority rather than each prison having to work to engage employers
- Prisons have reduced access to some resources due to the lack of an internet connection; always bear this in mind.

### Contact details

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<sup>11</sup> Criminal Records Bureau

### Case study 9 – HMP WOLDS

#### How to plan a whole organisation approach to employability

HMP Wolds is a Category 'C' training prison (an institution for prisoners who cannot be trusted in open conditions but who are unlikely to try to escape). It is managed by G4S Justice Services under contract to the Home Office. The Prison is located 16 miles west of Kingston Upon Hull, adjacent to HMP Everthorpe.

Currently the prison holds 395 sentenced adults, male prisoners over 21, all of whom have a minimum of six months to serve in a category C establishment.

The Wolds ethos is to seek to 'normalise' prison life by reflecting life outside in the wider community, with a view to ensuring a smoother transition on release and decreasing re-offending rates. This is achieved in part by providing the prisoners with a range of purposeful development opportunities including education, training, workshops and sporting activities.

#### The G4S Way

Work, family and housing are seen as the three main factors which influence a prisoner's likelihood of re-offending on release. Developing sound employability skills is key to supporting prisoners 'through the gate'. As an organisation, G4S are driving the development of a strategic solution to employability.

Working in collaboration with other G4S managed prisons, Wolds have identified a planning cycle and method to develop a sustained approach to employability. As part of this they are building an **employability framework**, which is informing the development of Individual Learning Plans (ILPs), based on the ASSET Skills employability matrix mapping tool

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

which will provide Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement (RARPA) opportunities across the prison. As an emerging piece of work the prison is currently preparing to pilot the approach as non-accredited training with 40 learners in April 2010. The full offer will provide accredited options and funding will be sought accordingly.

#### How it works

The employability framework will provide the base for all learning and skills activity across the prison. The structure is designed to promote the development of a holistic, wrap-around service for prisoners which has no formal direct delivery element. The 10 essential planning elements have been:

1. Buy-in from management to embed employability skills across the prison
2. To recognise the importance of partnership working involving all staff (prisoners, work supervisors, vocational trainers, teachers, prison officers and resettlement officers)
3. Time for staff training to measure and recognise 'softer' skills including time keeping, customer care, dress codes, self-control and team working

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4. To acknowledge the need to link employability targets across all prison activity including education, work, training and while on the wings
5. To promote the importance of self-assessment when measuring employability skills. The prison plan to use a RARPA model based around a RAG system (red, amber, green traffic lighting)
6. To embed literacy, language and numeracy, using the Tools Library Initial Assessment Tools 1, as a fundamental element in the framework to ensure appropriate assessment and support for learners
7. To design relevant active learning experiences with 'in-house' employers. Examples include cleaning and gardening in the estate, manufacturing workshops and the Summit Media Workshop
8. Maintaining links with the local businesses to build credible workshops
9. To have the confidence to do something different
10. To ensure all achievements, large and small, will be recognised through in-house certification where external accreditation is not possible.

### Challenges

When planning activity, HMP Wolds identified three potential key challenges:

- Portfolio building was considered resource intensive and impractical with limited staff
- Funding available for employability qualifications is difficult to source
- Buy-in from all staff to use the formal RARPA assessment process.

The need to work within these constraints has shaped HMP Wolds pilot employability offer. The programme will be for non-accredited training which will provide the prison with greatly needed flexibility around staff training and will keep administration costs to a minimum.

### Wolds' Top Tips

- Spend time planning your approach
- Do not work in isolation; include all relevant partners in delivery and design
- Pilot your approach
- Develop a framework that works for all – client group, organisation and employers
- Get buy-in at all levels of the organisation
- Champion the importance of employability skills
- Emphasise that the prison regime should focus on preparing prisoners for employment
- Market your offer well; make clear links between work on the inside and the development of employability skills
- Ensure that prisoners who have or are working towards literacy, language and numeracy qualifications understand the relevance of these skills in the workplace.

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### **Wider intended impact**

In addition, the framework will actively support the prison regime. It is hoped that the development of employability skills can be linked to prisoners' incentives and privileges and that appropriate behaviour will be rewarded and recorded through the RARPA model. In turn, the RARPA model will provide evidence for the Employment Board when assessing a prisoner's readiness for work.

### **Contact information**

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### Case study 10 – HMP Young Offenders Institution Hindley

#### Developing employability skills through active learning

HMP and Young Offender Institution Hindley is a prison for young people based in the North West. Most of the young people are only there for an average of 48 days which means that courses have to be roll-on roll-off and delivered in such a way as to provide learners with some recognition of their learning. Provision is currently funded by the Learning and Skills Council. Skills for Life Manager, Amina Bodhania, has been working on the employability project.

An employability skills pilot project has been developed with learners in the staff canteen. The learners, who are working towards an NVQ Level 2 in catering, work in the canteen for five days a week, six hours a day. The canteen is a working kitchen serving meals and snacks to staff and visitors. Training delivery is spearheaded by the vocational trainers and experienced chefs, Morgan and Scott. One day a week, Kiera, a Learning Support Practitioner, helps learners to develop their employability skills. There are plans to develop the model into other vocational contexts.

Specific criteria are applied to the learners who participate on this course.

- They must be on a longer than average sentence.
- They need to have a literacy and numeracy assessment using the PLUS initial assessment tool.
- They are interviewed and observed over time to identify their employability skills.
- They have to have a basic food hygiene qualification
- They need to be well-behaved learners with security clearance because they are working in a public-facing kitchen mess.

The programme design covers most of the skills identified in the Asset Skills Employability Matrix (see next page).

At the end of the course the learners get:

- An Employability qualification
- Literacy and numeracy qualifications at the appropriate level
- NVQ L2 in catering

Staff continue to monitor learners' NVQ achievements and employment on release from prison.

#### What makes Hindley's practice effective?

The programme covers all aspects of the Asset Skills Employability Matrix; all activities are cross-referenced to the development of fundamental, personal management or team work skills. Although employers are not directly involved in the design and delivery of the course, the chef (vocational tutor), who has led on the development of the course and the design of the activities, has extensive occupational experience including running his own restaurant and working in large hotel kitchens, so thus has the right kind of knowledge to identify employability skills



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in context. He is supported to deliver the course by a technician and a learning support practitioner. Hindley already has strong links with employers in other vocational areas which will be expanded to the staff canteen in the future.

### The 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 drives 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, Customer Care

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

In order to teach employability skills effectively, the staff have identified the following critical factors:

- Active learning approaches are extremely effective at helping learners develop personal management, behaviour management, problem solving and teamwork skills as well as building their confidence. The learners do not want to do formal learning or to be in a classroom. There is a learning pod attached to the mess and, when they are not busy, learners take part in games and activities; an element of problem solving and competition keep the learners engaged and motivated. Learners' feedback indicates that they recognise the value of these activities. Said one: "I think the games were fine and a more interesting way of learning"
- Time to develop good resources and an active learning approach really pays off and needs to be built in to create good quality provision
- Training for staff in active learning approaches<sup>12</sup>
- Language, literacy and numeracy and employability skills development needs to be embedded into a real working context such as the mess, rather than be delivered as stand-alone skills
- Partnership working between vocational staff, the head chef and the learning support staff both in the development and delivery of the programme
- Wider partnership working, for example with IAG staff, resettlement staff and local employers when arranging work experience through ROTL [Release on Temporary Licence]

Supported by their Skills for Life Support Programme Development Adviser, the team at Hindley has developed a problem solving game. '**Build your Empire**' is set in a catering context and is mapped to the Asset Skills Employability Matrix.

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<sup>12</sup> Training module 5a, Promoting active learning in embedded literacy, language and numeracy, developed through the Skills for Life Support Programme

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In addition to developing their own active-learning activities and resources, staff have found the following materials useful:

- LSIS Teaching and Learning Programme resources (formerly Standards Unit) <sup>13</sup>
- Thinking through mathematics materials <sup>14</sup>
- LLU+OLASS numeracy packs <sup>15</sup>.

Staff at Hindley have faced the following challenges in the design and delivery of their provision:

- The short length of sentences given to the learners which makes it difficult for learners to achieve qualifications. Currently, they target learners who have longer sentences
- Finding funding to allow the learning support and Skills for Life tutors to work in the mess. To overcome this, they encourage a team approach to delivery with all members of staff getting involved
- Funding externally accredited qualifications. They are therefore recognising small step achievements using the RARPA <sup>16</sup> framework.

Moving forward, staff plan to:

- use the model of partnership working developed with the support of the Skills for Life Support Programme for future developments.
- transfer the catering/employability qualification model to other vocational areas
- continue to develop employability-related learning activities
- develop an employability-related credit framework linked to a new individual learning plan so that learners can be encouraged to identify and record the employability skills they have developed

### Contact information

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<sup>13</sup> <http://tlp.excellencegateway.org.uk/tlp/subject-resources.html>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.ncetm.org.uk/resources/8848>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www1.lsbu.ac.uk/lluplus/>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.rarpatoolkit.com/en/rarpa.asp>

### Case study 11 – Lufton College

#### Supporting learners into employment

Lufton College is an independent specialist college in Somerset, but its approach to employability has many lessons to be shared with mainstream providers, especially in two areas:

- interaction with employers,
- presenting the Individual Learning Plan to staff and learners in an easily read format.

Learners usually stay at Lufton for three years and come from a wide geographical area to take advantage of the varied curriculum choice. After a three-day assessment visit, a joint decision is made between all parties as to whether the college is appropriate for the learner. Starts are predominantly in September but some join at other times. This causes few problems since each learner has an individual programme.

Lufton has recently restructured the curriculum into three pathways:

1. The Pathway to Independence (30 learners) covers pre-employment vocational options and focuses on social skills and independence. For example, the formal programme starts at 10am to allow learners more time to learn to get ready for college as this is seen as a key learning target.
2. The Pathway to Employability (50 learners), focuses on vocational options such as catering, car-valeting, retail, horticulture, and conservation. Learners may start with several options and, when they are ready, choose to focus on one or two and add an internal or external placement.
3. Learners on the Pathway to Community and Employment (40 learners) live in supported accommodation/houses in the town and may spend more or even all their time in placements. The focus is on developing independence.

Learners can progress between pathways or may stay on the same pathway throughout their programme. The pathways recognise the different needs of learners and reflect the college's mission to help young people to move on to the next stage of their lives.

Placements are key to the success of the programme. Internal placements include an excellent coffee shop on site, which is open to the public. However, external placements are crucial. Whether learners progress to full employment, supported employment or voluntary work, the aim is to recognise and build their potential. The staff say that “employers are on side and come back every year” They have an employers' evening, when students give the employers certificates. It will say “You're a great employer” and include photos of the young person at work. Lufton offers free training for employers on disability awareness and communication. All students have communication as part of their programme but not necessarily the social use of language programme.

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Students on placement are well supported by a job coach who initially stays with them all the time and then drops back. If this is not possible, then the placement is questioned. Is it appropriate? “She likes going” is not good enough.

Hard questions have to be asked. Placements have to be realistic and work for both sides. The provider might need to think laterally. For instance, a learner interested in farming may not be able to have a work placement on a farm because of health and safety restrictions, but may be placed in a pet shop or a farming shop. Learners are encouraged to select and apply for placements from the list available just as they would apply for a paid job. Non-readers can search job adverts visually and interviews are real. Staff encourage employers to send learners on the same induction programme as their paid staff.

As Lufton is residential, most learners have to move away at the end of the course. For this reason they often select national employers such as Mc Donald’s, ASDA, pizza chains, Iceland, Nationwide Crash Repairs, Peacocks or the Coop, but they also use some local garages and childcare nurseries, as well as a conservation volunteer trust and charity shops. Wherever they work, the aim for learners is to learn the routines and get good references. Towards the end of the course, the college tries to liaise with the home area. If Lufton know where the learner is going they can help clients contact suitable local employers or a branch of the company for whom they are doing work experience. Some Local Authorities are helpful and will support the transition back home.

All pathways include lots of personal and social development. Learners have termly reviews with their job coach and the employer. Targets for the next period are identified. Staff at Lufton consider what stops the young person being employed and work on this need. For instance, if an employer says “He will be more useful if he can file alphabetically”, the learner will work on this at college.

As well as lots of feedback, the key to an effective work placement is to be prepared to see what students can do and let them try: recognise the student’s potential and don’t put barriers in the way. Think “How can I help them to do it?” We all learn by being at work and don’t underestimate what learners can do. Employers will often say “I was surprised she could do that,” or “He enjoys doing a job that others find boring”.

Literacy and numeracy are embedded across the curriculum and are seen as relevant by staff and learners. All areas of college are developing resources for the Pathway to Independence as part of the SfLSP. Many can be adapted for use at work. For example, a [car valeting resource](#) uses photographs of learners cleaning a car. These can be used for sequencing, sharing the tasks, communication skills and providing a check list of work done. Using actual photographs the staff and learners produce a visual reminder list to take to work such as a sequence for making sandwiches or wearing appropriate clothes for the job.

Each learner has [a colour coded ILP](#) based on their long-term goals. Student C wants to live independently and to work in a supermarket or café. His needs and current skills have been matched to units at entry level 3. The goals within the sun symbol are current short-term goals applicable across the curriculum and will be

## Skills for Life Support Programme

replaced with others as they are established. These will usually include two literacy or numeracy goals and one personal and social development goal. The long-term goals have been planned over three years but will be reviewed regularly.

Lufton consider the key employability skills are health and safety awareness, appropriate dress, ability to follow instructions and acceptable behaviour. These skills are built into the ILP. Staff adopt a consistent approach to behaviour and all students follow an appropriate social use of language programme

The key challenges in making their provision successful are people's expectations, the recession and bureaucracy.

Many people do not expect learners with learning difficulties to work. There is a culture of over-care with some staff and parents having low expectations. Shift patterns amongst care staff mean different staff are on duty when learners are getting ready for work and some do not stress the importance of being ready on time. Staff training at all levels is crucial coupled with good support for employers. Employers are often surprised at how much learners can do and how willing they are to take on repetitive jobs.

The recession means fewer jobs for everyone. However, offering free labour by a well supported young person can be an incentive to an employer to offer a placement.

Staff at Lufton feel that both the benefit system and the minimum wage hamper employment opportunities for some of their learners. To give an example, a learner finished her course after a successful placement in a fast-food outlet. She wanted to work for a similar fast-food chain in her home area and was willing to work unpaid for several weeks to show what she could do or to work for a lower wage if she was not as fast as others, but this was not possible. The recommendation would be to allow these learners to work for a realistic rate and receive benefit to top up.

### **Lufton's top tips for effective employability skills provision**

- Develop effective partnership with employers, with learners supported by suitably trained job coaches
- Give learners plenty of support initially and then encourage them to become more independent and reach their true potential.
- Allow literacy, numeracy and ICT specialists time work with vocational staff to plan, make and adapt resources.

### Case study 12 – Strode College

#### Supporting prisoners to find employment on release

Strode College in Street, Somerset, has been a provider of education to prisons for more than 25 years. Currently, the college has 300 staff delivering literacy, numeracy, ICT and vocational skills to 10 prisons in the South-West: Bristol, Channings Wood, Dartmoor, Eastwood Park, Erlestoke, Exeter, Guys March, Leyhill, Portland and The Verne.

#### Introduction

In 2008, the College was awarded a grant to develop an employability skills pilot first run at HMP Erlestoke. The pilot was devised by Jane Snedden, Group Manager for Offender Learning and Skills, as an attempt to give prisoners recognition for the skills they demonstrated while at work in prison industry workshops where there were no accreditation opportunities. The end result for prisoners involved would be twofold: reinforcement of the employability skills they need on the outside to get and keep a job; and a **real reference** that could be used in job applications.

Currently seven of Strode's prisons offer the 12-week employability programme, four per year with about 10 roll-on, roll-off learners in each group. The only entry requirement is that offenders are working in the prison industry workshops – for example in lighting, construction, potpourri packaging, furniture assembly, print shops and clothing stores. This group rarely access the education provision and it is hoped that involvement in the employability skills programme will encourage greater take up. The prison industry supervisors/and instructors' involvement was extremely important when developing the programme; it encouraged their awareness of the importance of good employability skills in reducing re-offending.

The programme is advertised and actively promoted by the college tutor, workshop supervisors, and information, advice and guidance staff

#### Developing the employability skills programme

Jane and her team began by identifying the key employability skills valued by employers and therefore needed by their learners. These have since been revised following feedback from the workshop supervisors/instructors and comprise:

- punctuality
- motivation and concentration
- manner and language
- work independently
- interaction with others
- attention to health and safety in the workplace
- quality of work.

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### Delivery model

Because of the key role played by the workshop supervisor/instructor, learners' employability skills are assessed during every work session. The employability tutor meets with the supervisor/instructor each week to discuss learner progress. The tutor also meets with each learner for 15 minutes every week. At these sessions, the learner is encouraged to reflect on the skills listed above and discuss with the tutor their performance on each skill that week. They consider what went well, aspects of their work that were not up to standard and areas for improvement.

At the start of the programme, learners carry out **an employability skills initial assessment**. At the end of the first week, they are expected to re-assess their skills and to compare their assessment with that of their workshop supervisor/instructor, identifying areas of strength and areas for improvement (**Review of initial assessment week**). There are high expectations of the learners; they are required to achieve an 80% success rate in each of the target skills every week in order to gain a reference at the end of the programme.

There are weekly sessions to review progress (**Employability skills progress sheet**). The employability tutor uses these sessions to focus on supporting the learner to develop their weaker skills. They also provide the opportunity to refer the learner to appropriate education provision, for example to literacy, language or numeracy provision, one-to-one or classroom-based, or to courses leading to employability skills qualifications, such as Ready, Steady Work (OCR) <http://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/type/vrq/rsw/index.html> or NCFE Employability Skills <http://www.ncfe.org.uk/Default.aspx?id=18343>

At the end of the course, learners receive a detailed reference.

Learners value the regular opportunities to reflect on and review their progress one-to-one. They were asked what sort of learning activities helped most to develop their skills:

*“Talking through my work with the tutor.”*

*“By thinking about what I do rather than just doing it, I can see ways to improve.”*

(Learners at HMP Erlestoke)

*“Reviewing the working week enabled me to think more about how to handle situations better.”*

(Learner at HMP The Verne)

### What makes the model effective?

The course waiting lists, positive feedback from the workshop supervisors/instructors and the growth of the provision across Strode's prisons are all evidence of success. For example, 15 learners at HMP Erlestoke were asked to rate how useful the programme has been in increasing their chances of finding and keeping a job on a scale of 1–5 with 1 being no use at all and 5 being extremely useful. Of these 13 gave a rating of 5.

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Jane and her team feel that the following aspects of the model make it particularly effective:

- The learner takes responsibility for the initial and ongoing assessment of their employability skills
- The skills are relevant to the needs of offenders: *“I understand what an employer wants from me.”* and *“I am more aware of what it takes to be a good employee.”*
- It draws offenders who wouldn't otherwise access education into learning
- It links together the Education and Employment staff and fits around the existing prison regime, making it easy to implement
- The workshop supervisor/instructor plays a key role in the continuous assessment of the employability skills
- The employability tutor has a weekly one-to-one with the learner and workshop supervisor/instructor to review targets and discuss any issues
- Offenders value the opportunity to leave the programme with a detailed, factual reference that will help them to secure employment on release or within the prison.

*“I have discovered through comments from learners that the reference is well received by the various review boards (i.e. parole and D category, etc) so this is a further incentive to get learners involved.”*

Employability tutor at HMP Erlestoke

*“People are using the reference not just with a view to getting a job, but also for character reference (those wishing to be self-employed) and for ‘political’ reasons, e.g. to count for immigration/Offender Assessment System (OASys), etc.*

Employability tutor at HMP The Verne

### Challenges

The main challenge was to convince the workshop supervisors/instructors of the value of the initiative. By taking time to explain the purpose of the project and listening to their suggestions for improvement, the supervisors/instructors are now fully on board. Ensuring consistency in the way the initiative is being implemented across the prisons has been a further challenge, requiring rigorous and time-consuming internal verification processes.

### Strode's top tips for effective employability skills provision

- Encourage everyone to be involved in planning the programmes and to have their say
- Ensure learners are clear about their employability skills' targets and their role in meeting them
- Embed the literacy and numeracy skills development in activities learners enjoy



## Skills for Life Support Programme

- Ensure your employability tutors have had experiences in business or of employing their own staff so that they can draw real-life examples from their own experience.

### **Contact information**

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## Appendix 2: Employability skills resource matrix

Resource	Job roles & topics																			
	Employer					Adviser					Employ. Tutor					L&N Tutor				
	Maths	Comm	Problem	Team	Org self	Maths	Comm	Problem	Team	Org self	Maths	Comm	Problem	Team	Org self	Maths	Comm	Problem	Team	Org self
Skills for Business Master Employability Framework <a href="http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/VLSP-23098">http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/VLSP-23098</a>	✓							✓												
A Skills Toolkit for Employers (Asset Skills) <a href="http://www.assetskills.org/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.asp?IID=494&amp;slD=687">http://www.assetskills.org/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.asp?IID=494&amp;slD=687</a>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓				✓						✓
BBC Skillswise Website <a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/">http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/</a>	✓						✓				✓									
Contextualised Skills for Life resources from the Key Skills Support Programme <a href="http://www.ngfl-cymru.org.uk/vtc-home/vtc-key_skills-home/vtc-keyskills-in-vocational-areas">http://www.ngfl-cymru.org.uk/vtc-home/vtc-key_skills-home/vtc-keyskills-in-vocational-areas</a>	✓			✓									✓			✓				
JobcentrePlus: Job Kit <a href="http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/jcp/stellent/groups/jcp/documents/sit_estudio/dev_015519.pdf">http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/jcp/stellent/groups/jcp/documents/sit_estudio/dev_015519.pdf</a>		✓			✓			✓						✓						
KeySkills4u.com <a href="http://www.keyskills4u.com/">http://www.keyskills4u.com/</a>		✓																		
Get on at work contextualised materials GOAW contextualised materials		✓		✓									✓			✓		✓		

## Skills for Life Support Programme

Resource	Job roles & topics																			
	Employer					Adviser					Employ. Tutor					L&N Tutor				
	Maths	Comm	Problem	Team work	Org self	Maths	Comm	Problem	Team work	Org self	Maths	Comm	Problem	Team work	Org self	Maths	Comm	Problem	Team work	Org self
Jobcoach <a href="http://backtowork.direct.gov.uk/index.html">http://backtowork.direct.gov.uk/index.html</a>			✓		✓			✓				✓						✓		
BBC raw skills for everyday life <a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk/raw/">http://www.bbc.co.uk/raw/</a>			✓			✓					✓									
Skills for Life Materials for Embedded Learning – e2e Entry to Employment <a href="http://rwp.qia.oxi.net/embeddedlearning/search.cfm">http://rwp.qia.oxi.net/embeddedlearning/search.cfm</a>				✓				✓	✓	✓										✓
Supporting improving own learning and performance guide to good practice <a href="http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=224070">http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=224070</a>					✓															
Initial assessment toolkit – Learning for Work, Key Skills Support Programme <a href="http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/media/KSSP/ia_toolkit_lo_res.pdf">http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/media/KSSP/ia_toolkit_lo_res.pdf</a>						✓					✓								✓	
NCETM Workplace mathematics video clips <a href="https://www.ncetm.org.uk/resources/13735">https://www.ncetm.org.uk/resources/13735</a>						✓				✓										
Move On Learner Route <a href="http://www.move-on.org.uk/ilr_php/numeracy/welcome.php">http://www.move-on.org.uk/ilr_php/numeracy/welcome.php</a>						✓														
Tools Library <a href="http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/toolslibrary">http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/toolslibrary</a>							✓			✓										

## Skills for Life Support Programme

Resource	Job roles & topics																			
	Employer					Adviser					Employ. Tutor					L&N Tutor				
	Maths	Comm	Problem	Team work	Org self	Maths	Comm	Problem	Team work	Org self	Maths	Comm	Problem	Team work	Org self	Maths	Comm	Problem	Team work	Org self
iRoute <a href="http://www.move-on.org.uk/intermed_flash.asp">http://www.move-on.org.uk/intermed_flash.asp</a>							✓													
Get on at Work Generic workplace Skills for Life checklist							✓													
Improving practice in foundation learning: Could I do that job? <a href="http://ntlcp.qia.org.uk/fit/screens/fit_01_02_02_00/page.html">http://ntlcp.qia.org.uk/fit/screens/fit_01_02_02_00/page.html</a>								✓					✓							
The 14-19 Workforce Support (formerly the Diploma Support Programme) : Inside work <a href="http://www.diploma-support.org/resourcesandtools/insidework/">http://www.diploma-support.org/resourcesandtools/insidework/</a>									✓					✓					✓	
Improving practice in foundation learning: Meet the experts <a href="http://ntlcp.qia.org.uk/fit/screens/fit_07_01_00_00/page.html">http://ntlcp.qia.org.uk/fit/screens/fit_07_01_00_00/page.html</a>									✓					✓						
Vocational learning support programme: The recruitment game <a href="http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/VLSP29/index.htm">http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/VLSP29/index.htm</a>									✓				✓							✓
Move On Teacher Route ESOL resources ESOL resources										✓				✓						

## Skills for Life Support Programme

Resource	Job roles & topics																			
	Employer					Adviser					Employ. Tutor					L&N Tutor				
	Maths	Comm	Problem	Team work	Org self	Maths	Comm	Problem	Team work	Org self	Maths	Comm	Problem	Team work	Org self	Maths	Comm	Problem	Team work	Org self
The Teaching and Learning Programme <a href="http://tlp.excellencegateway.org.uk/teachingandlearning/downloads/index_1sis.html#">http://tlp.excellencegateway.org.uk/teachingandlearning/downloads/index_1sis.html#</a>										✓			✓					✓		
Teaching speaking and listening, a toolkit for practitioners – Learning for Work, Key Skills Support Programme <a href="http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=224140">http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=224140</a>												✓					✓			
Brain Games <a href="http://www.braingames.org.uk/">http://www.braingames.org.uk/</a>												✓								
Skills for Life Materials for Embedded Learning – Family Life <a href="http://rwp.excellencegateway.org.uk/embeddedlearning/searchresults.cfm?setting=Family%20life:_focus%20on%20parenting&amp;set_title=Family%20life:_focus%20on%20parenting">http://rwp.excellencegateway.org.uk/embeddedlearning/searchresults.cfm?setting=Family%20life:_focus%20on%20parenting&amp;set_title=Family%20life:_focus%20on%20parenting</a>														✓						
Teaching and learning programme - Learning mathematics in context <a href="http://tlp.excellencegateway.org.uk/tlp/xcurricula/lmic/">http://tlp.excellencegateway.org.uk/tlp/xcurricula/lmic/</a>																✓				
Improving learning in mathematics <a href="http://tlp.excellencegateway.org.uk/teachingandlearning/downloads/default.aspx#math">http://tlp.excellencegateway.org.uk/teachingandlearning/downloads/default.aspx#math</a>																✓				
Skills for Working - for staff working with adult post-16 learners with learning difficulties or disabilities <a href="http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=SFW">http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=SFW</a>																	✓	✓		✓
Teaching & Learning Programme Employability website <a href="http://tlp.excellencegateway.org.uk/tlp/xcurricula/employability">http://tlp.excellencegateway.org.uk/tlp/xcurricula/employability</a>											✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					

## Skills for Life Support Programme

Resource	Job roles & topics																			
	Employer					Adviser					Employ. Tutor					L&N Tutor				
	Maths	Comm	Problem	Team work	Org self	Maths	Comm	Problem	Team work	Org self	Maths	Comm	Problem	Team work	Org self	Maths	Comm	Problem	Team work	Org self
Teaching and learning functional mathematics <a href="http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=201311">http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=201311</a>															✓					
Move On Teacher Route - The teacher route stop 2 CPD Summary of resources and teaching approaches to supporting numeracy <a href="http://www.move-on.org.uk/downloadsFile/downloads1733/MOWCS_supporting_num_in_lifelong_learning_Sep08.pdf">http://www.move-on.org.uk/downloadsFile/downloads1733/MOWCS_supporting_num_in_lifelong_learning_Sep08.pdf</a>															✓					
Move On The teacher route stop 4 teaching and learning Learning chunks and guidance <a href="http://www.move-on.org.uk/mu_route.asp?stop=4">http://www.move-on.org.uk/mu_route.asp?stop=4</a>																✓				
Teaching and learning – Key Skills Support Programme <a href="http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=195640">http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=195640</a>																		✓		
Supporting problem solving – Guide to good practice <a href="http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=224076">http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=224076</a>																		✓		
Supporting working with others – Guide to good practice <a href="http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=224079">http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=224079</a>																			✓	
Move On Learner Route <a href="http://www.move-on.org.uk/ilr_php/literacy/welcome.php">http://www.move-on.org.uk/ilr_php/literacy/welcome.php</a>																				✓

The Skills for Life Support Programme  
is delivered on behalf of the Learning  
and Skills Improvement Service by  
CfBT Education Trust and partners

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**CfBT Education Trust**

**LLU+ London South Bank University**

**Learning and Skills Network**

**The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education**

**National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy**