

# Making the most of the QCF

## Case Study



### **Project title: Delivering QCF units to support achievement and progression**

This case study illustrates how a partnership of third-sector providers are working to utilise the flexibility offered by the QCF to support learners that find it difficult to access the job market.

#### **Worth reading if you are interested in:**

- Pre employability programmes
- Developing holistic curriculum models
- Delivering QCF units to support achievement and progression
- Delivering a personalised curriculum

### **Contact information**

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#### **Participating organisation(s):**

Learning Plus, Inspire Cornwall, Eat that Frog, Inverteign Family Learning

### **What the provider set out to do and why**

Learning Plus is a Further Education provider operating exclusively with other third-sector providers to provide education and training to those disadvantaged individuals within Devon and Cornwall who are furthest from the job market. The three partners who feature in this case study are:

- Inspire Cornwall – a charity linked to the justice system that works with young people who have been ordered to attend a senior attendance centre every other Saturday for approximately 6 months.
- Eat that Frog – a community interest group offering a range of community projects from 16 to 96.
- Inverteign Family Learning – a family learning centre.

Learning Plus wanted to encourage its partners to take full advantage of the flexibility of the QCF and is currently (2012) taking part in the unit delivery trials. They have been working with their partners to help them deliver small employability and IT units and to combine these with wider support to enable those learners who sit outside the system

to engage with learning. In particular, they are encouraging organisations to integrate provision and services, supported by different funding streams, to create a holistic offer that is person-centred and that meets the diverse needs of their learners.

### **What has been achieved so far**

The three partners have developed innovative models based on unit delivery targeted at different groups within the region. Each is described below.

#### **Inspire Cornwall**

Inspire Cornwall has been working with the Cornwall Senior Attendance Centre (SAC) since Autumn 2011. The SAC is a well-established model of intervention for young offenders to assist them in making changes to their lives which will help them not to re-offend. This sentencing option is a restriction of liberty while allowing the offender to develop personal skills and accept responsibility for their own actions. It provides the opportunity to address issues such as binge drinking, employment, communication skills, handling conflict, knife crime, drugs, problem solving, social integration, lifestyles, health, offending behaviour.

The provider works with 70-100 young people for two Saturday mornings a month for approximately 6 months. They have developed a structured three-hour pre-employability programme that is supported throughout by targeted information, advice and guidance (IAG) provided by Next Step and is followed by a structured referral to further training or support to find work

Learners have an initial one-to-one session with a Next Step advisor to identify that individual's area for development and any barriers that need to be overcome, for example, drug and alcohol abuse, or conflict management. The ensuing teaching and learning is highly personalised to reflect these needs. Further support is scheduled at one month, three months and six months with a final follow-up after one year.

For the first time, young people on this programme are being given the opportunity to gain accredited units or qualifications on the QCF. For many, this is the first recognised qualification that they have achieved. All learners work towards the *NOCN Level 1 Award in Progression*. The provider initially selected units that reflected an individual's personalised needs with units in subjects such as drug and alcohol awareness. However, tutors have now recognised that such units might be perceived negatively by potential employers. As a result, all learners still have a personalised programme but work towards the same units: *Making Choices in Pursuit of Personal Goals* and *Developing Group and Teamwork Communications Skills*. The learning outcomes and assessment criteria of these units are sufficiently open-ended to act as vehicles for gathering evidence of learning in a variety of areas and contexts.

Trainers working on the programme had no prior experience of delivering accredited provision and had to undergo training. Many did this reluctantly, feeling demotivated at undergoing training when they felt that they already had extensive experience with this client group. Now that they have completed an initial teacher training qualification,

*Preparing to Teach in the Life Long Learning Sector qualification (PTLLS), they feel more accountable, recognise the positive impact that the new provision is having on learners and are seeking ways to be creative and introduce more innovative practice into teaching and learning.*

*“Learners have more sense of why they are there. They are acknowledging each other as peers on the project and believe they are being listened to and not being pre-judged. As a result, a learner voice forum is being developed.”*

*(Manager)*

Due to the success of this provision, the provider is identifying other progression routes to which they can refer learners, for example, they have set up a *Dads’ Group* which offers a qualification in parenting with the possibilities to work in a nursery.

### **Eat that Frog**

Eat that Frog has developed a two-week, holistic programme *Work it Out* based on a person-centred planning model that offers both accredited provision and extensive mentoring. The programme supports learner progression to either further learning, a job, or another predetermined outcome.

For the programme, the provider recruits approximately ten learners aged 19-24 through Job Centre Plus (JCP). Learners are likely to be disengaged and a long way from getting a job. The accredited provision (the learning element) is funded through SFA and JCP funds the mentoring through the Flexible Support Fund. In this way, the provider can offer a pre-engagement programme from 9 to 5 to replicate the working day.

*“The flexible support fund forms part of the overall Jobcentre Plus pre-work programme offer and is intended to be used to fill gaps, and add support, where Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) provision, non-contracted partner provision or adviser interventions are not sufficient or appropriate to meet a claimant’s needs. The fund is used to target appropriate support for individuals who would not be able to move closer or into work without such assistance.*

*“Eat That Frog were successful in gaining a grant to work across Torbay. The grant has been used to develop innovative support ideas to enable our customers to engage, undertake activities and move closer or into work. The fund has not been used for training that we can already fund, it has added value to the existing support and funding streams available.*

*“Our approach with Eat That Frog has been very much about them meeting our customer’s needs but it has also been flexible in how they deliver and, latterly, what they deliver to meet any additional needs we identified.”*

*(District Partnership Manager, JCP)*

*Work it Out* relies on strong partnership working with JCP and with voluntary organisations in the region. A lead tutor from Eat that Frog coordinates the programme and different voluntary organisations provide practical activities each day. JCP advisors attend and participate in some of the activities. Learners are not given the whole programme in advance but on a daily basis as tutors believe that this encourages engagement. Alongside the activities, JCP advisors discuss opportunities for progression with learners, and outside speakers provide information on voluntary placements. The involvement of JCP in the programme gives learners a different perspective on JCP advisors; it removes the 'them' and 'us' culture and the fear of the Job Centre.

Learning on the programme is accredited through 2 NOCN units: *Developing Personal Development Skills*, and *Developing DJ Skills* as tutors have found it helpful to blend a vocational unit with one that has a greater focus on personal development / social employability.

The first cohort of nine learners has now completed the programme and the majority have achieved the two units (16 units have been certificated in total). For some, it was the first accredited learning they had ever completed. Four learners have moved into full-time formal education, one into JCP work experience, one into work and one into volunteering. Eat that Frog has now recruited a second cohort who are already on programme.

Tutors have observed significant progress being made by the learners during the two weeks; their increased confidence and how they work as a team and support each other. This was particularly evident on the final day which is organised by the learners themselves who make a group presentation to JCP advisors, organise guest speakers and prepare the lunch.

*"The group's differing abilities, backgrounds and current circumstances means we cannot have strict lesson plans and lots of classroom work, and I have to be on my toes to meet their learning needs. Mixing up workbook sessions with outdoor skills activities and cooking sessions is key, as is giving the sense that they are having fun – whilst, at the same time, helping them to learn that you cannot have it all your own way in life and that any task or job requires perseverance to get it done, even when you don't enjoy it all the time.*

*"Seeing the group of individuals gel over the 2 weeks and new friendships form is very rewarding. The young people leave the programme with their next step clearly defined, be that volunteering or further training – both activities helping them to get a job that they are interested in."*

*(Lead tutor for Personal Development*

## **Inverteign Family Learning**

Inverteign Family Learning works with a wide range of adults, some of whom are referred by JCP, others who self-refer as the centre is based within the complex of a school. The client group includes mothers with small children who have few, or no, qualifications and want to support their children and eventually return to work, and learners who want to develop additional skills for employment or for promotion.

The Centre offers IT qualifications and support for the development of literacy, numeracy and employability. Centre staff recognise that enrolling for full IT qualifications is a big commitment for the majority of their client group. Many of their learners, while unemployed, are not drawing down benefits and are therefore ineligible for funding through unit funding for the unemployed; others may only require particular units. Through participation in the unit delivery trials, the centre has developed a more flexible model of delivery that better meets the needs of their diverse client group, whatever level they are working at.

*“This removes the risk that learners will not complete if their circumstances change. We can personalise the programme to the learner and pick specific units that meet their skills needs.”*

*(Centre Manager)*

The provider has revised their timetable and changed the pattern of delivery of IT units from 2 hours a week to one day a week over 6 weeks for each three-credit (30-hour) unit. This has provided greater flexibility in recruitment; learners may start at different times of the year as the units are no longer delivered in a fixed order. For example, a learner wanting to achieve a Level 3 Certificate in ITQ can slot into the programme in mid-year if appropriate.

The centre has adopted a holistic approach to teaching and learning which is broader than the delivery of IT skills. Tutors have identified that many learners need support with literacy; some may have already achieved a Level 2 Adult Literacy qualification but still struggle with the *Word Processing Software* unit as their writing skills are weak. In response to this, the Centre has now introduced QCF units in *Creative Writing* and *Using Writing for Meaning* alongside the IT units.

Tutors are structuring the delivery of the IT units in a way that relates to the individual interests of learners and their aspirations, for example, if the goal is to enter work, the focus will be on CV writing and job applications. They are also developing employability skills through structured group feedback and evaluation sessions on different aspects of the IT unit which give learners the opportunity to work as a team and to give and receive feedback from their peers.

## **What still needs to done**

### **Inspire Cornwall**

- Undertake further work and training with tutors on how the QCF operates and on evidence gathering and assessment and how the two relate.
- Consider more innovative ways of assessing learners and build in assessment of achievement at different levels. Move to different types of evidence other than what is captured in workbooks
- Build relations with other partners to support learner progression.
- Develop teaching and learning in English and maths to better support learners.
- Consider additional training programmes on a Saturday afternoon to address the particular interests and goals of those who want to continue in education and training and work towards additional qualifications.
- Celebrate the achievements of learners, many of whom have never experienced success.
- Capture the impact of the programme more systematically and monitor learner progression.
- Employ a support worker who could work with learners to overcome some of the barriers to learning and work, for example, housing.

### **Eat that Frog**

- Explore how the model could be adapted for 14-19 early intervention and engagement.
- Encourage previous participants in the programme to act as role models and illustrate the longer-term benefits of engagement.
- Explore how they might accredit other aspects of learning, for example, food hygiene.
- Continue to review the programme and build links with new partners in the voluntary sector who have a shared vision.

### **Inverteign Family Learning**

- Look at how the unit offer can be expanded to better meet the diverse needs of their client group.
- Develop packages of units to support employability.

### **Learning Plus**

- Share the innovative practice of the three providers with others in their network and those beyond the region.
- Work with individual providers, where appropriate, to further develop assessment and quality assurance.

- Look at further opportunities to support holistic models of delivery that can be supported by QCF unit delivery.
- Further develop understanding of the flexibilities of the QCF amongst the partners.
- Ensure the level and depth of IAG used by partners is always excellent.
- Continue discussions with awarding organisations with regard to the cost of unit delivery.

## **Key learning points**

### **Inspire Cornwall**

- Good IAG at the start of, and during, the programme is essential to its success.
- When developing the programme, marry the skills and expertise of staff and empower them to be creative.
- Get to know learners better – how they learn and where they need support – use this to identify a progression route at an early stage.

### **Eat that Frog**

- Ensure that the open ended nature of the employability units assesses the learning rather and doesn't dictate the programme.
- Ensure that learners, and staff, are aware that individual units are a measurement of distance travelled and act as a stepping-stone to achievement.
- Choose tutors carefully and support them – a poor experience one day can disengage a learner.
- It is important that all partners involved in the programme have the shared goal to progress the learner rather than to retain them on another programme within their own organisation.
- Present the programme in bite size chunks –this keeps the learner engaged.

### **Inverteign Family Learning**

- Unit delivery offers opportunities for a more flexible timetable with learners able to enrol at different points and to select the units they actually need.
- It is helpful to work with a larger provider as this facilitates keeping up to date with developments in the sector and the sharing of good practice.

### **For the partnership**

- Smaller providers recognise the benefits of being a member of a consortium as it gives them access to a wider range of programmes including staff training.
- QCF unit delivery is ideally suited to learners who could be considered high risk in terms of completing full qualifications.