

Making the most of the QCF

Case Study



Project title: Routes to employment – innovative use of QCF to deliver pre-employment and sector-based work academies

Newcastle City Learning (NCL) is building on its experience with working with the unemployed and Jobcentre Plus (JCP) to develop routes through to employment.

Worth reading if you are interested in:

- QCF programmes for the adult unemployed
- Sector-based work academies
- Partnership working

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Participating organisation:

Newcastle City Learning

What the provider set out to do and why

Working in partnership with Jobcentre Plus (JCP), Newcastle City Learning (NCL) wanted to develop a comprehensive flow of programmes to support unemployed learners through initial assessment and support. This would be promoted as 'Stepping Stones to Employment' (a pre-employment programme) leading through to sector-based work academies. The programmes would be developed and delivered through an offering of flexible QCF units and qualifications.

NCL has expertise in a number of vocational sectors (Business Administration, Retail, Hospitality, and Health and Social Care) and is able to work fast and flexibly to meet the requirements of JCP, employers and learners. It operates successfully with JCP via a named JCP regional co-ordinator contact and a nominated provider contact through which programmes can be quickly developed and contracted.

What has been achieved so far

Key features of the QCF development included recognition of the needs of learners and employers, and the contextualisation of flexible units and qualifications. The units and qualification were chosen by factoring in consideration such as the generic nature of the units, the extent of options within the qualifications, and the appropriateness of the assessment methodology. NCL found that, although there may be a large number of awarding organisations promoting particular qualifications, only a few offer the flexibility of assessment methodology that suit a clientele that may be lacking in confidence or have poor previous educational experiences.

Once potential qualifications and associated units had been identified, there was a significant amount of work done to provide support materials for learners such as learning logs, task workbooks, and learner tracking sheets. In cases where there is substantive work experience within a sector-based work academy, NCL also developed work books and task sheets for employers to review and sign off, thereby enabling work experience to be accredited through QCF units.

NCL recognised that there are large numbers of JCP clients who may not be employment-ready and so, in partnership with JCP, Next Steps and others, a two-week Skills Health Check programme has been developed that provides a mix of Skills for Life, and QCF ICT and Employability Skills. Learners on this programme are then encouraged to progress (in the case of NCL) on to the follow up programme 'Stepping Stones to Employment' and/or a sector-based work academy.

'Stepping Stones to Employment' spans 16 weeks and provides an opportunity for learners to develop skills and confidence and to gain QCF units which will equip them for employment. The main outcomes of the programme are generic employability units and qualifications. Working with JCP has provided the opportunity to add other qualifications, for example, a food safety certificate.

The sector-based work academies are a fast response to employer vacancies whereby the unemployed clients are matched against employer characteristics and placed on a programme of defined QCF units/qualifications and work experience with the opportunity of a guaranteed job interview at the end of the programme. A programme can be up to 6 weeks in length. When a sector-based work academy is proposed, the expectation is that a programme will be put together within 10-14 days from initial contact by JCP.

An example of the ability to provide a fast response relates to the sector-based work academy for fast food outlet, Dixy Chicken. There were 25 vacancies to be filled and, working with JCP, there was the recognition of the need for a pre-screening assessment. 15 JCP clients attended the allocated slot out of an expected 43. As there were insufficient numbers to meet the employer requirements, JCP requested an additional screening slot which NCL delivered within the same day.

The pre-screening assessment devised to meet Dixy Chicken's expectations looked

for: a pro-active approach; assistance with pro-active selling; flexibility for a range of duties; communication skills; full flexibility regarding hours; and a high standard of personal hygiene.

Eventually, 13 candidates were chosen to go forward. The qualification that was selected as appropriate was the 'NCFE Entry Level 3 Award in Employability Skills' consisting of 4 units: work awareness; problem solving for work; understanding conflict at work; and health and safety in places of work. Of the 13 candidates, 11 were employed and 2 found employment elsewhere.

A further example of responsiveness was a sector-based work academy that was supporting a range of employers in the hospitality and catering sector. There was a dialogue with all of the employers around work experience placements and opportunity for guaranteed interviews. Learners were given access to a mix of classroom-based and work-based support. Employers were encouraged to support QCF learning through signing off work books. In this example, learners were able to obtain 13 credits of a 'Level 1 Certificate in Occupational Studies – Hospitality and Catering'.

What the provider still needs to do

Although support is maximised during the sector-based work academy programmes, it has been identified that those learners who do not gain employment are not provided with follow-up programmes. Therefore, a strategic approach needs to be developed between JCP and NCL to ensure a consistent support programme is in place which will further develop the skills of the learners in readiness for any future interviews.

It has been noted that some employers require candidates to complete online applications. For some learners with low IT literacy, this may not be appropriate in the short time-frame of a sector-based work academy. There is one example of a major employer waiving this stipulation after consultation with NCL. Where this is not the case, learners will need to be aware of the necessity of being IT-literate.

What the project wants to share with other schools, colleges and training providers

The following resources are available in a zipped resource folder accompanying this case study:

1. Learner tracking sheet.
2. Task booklet (Hospitality and Catering).
3. Candidate learning log.
4. Tasks to complete in your workplace document.

Key learning points

- Close contact with businesses to support the staff and learners throughout the programme develops the confidence levels of the learner group (this was identified in their final evaluation).
- Close links with JCP enables quick responses to queries re benefits, expenses etc.
- Providing QCF units and qualifications that meet the needs of learners requires constant review of both the qualifications and the awarding organisation assessment requirements.
- Generic QCF qualifications can be contextualised quickly through simple changes to the unit materials and examples.
- Working well in groups, and encouraging each other to do well were two key feedback points raised during the final evaluation of the Dixy Chicken sector-based work academy.
- Including interview preparation in the training programme supports learner confidence prior to their work experience.