

Maths and English Provider-Employer Protocols – Enhancing the Apprenticeship Supply-Chain

Introduction

1. Initiating, maintaining and enhancing the Provider-Employer Relationship
2. Collaborative Planning and Delivery of Learning
3. Collaborative Processes and Effective Communications

Introduction

This resource has been developed by the CETTAcademy on behalf of AELP, as part of a project commissioned and funded by Education and Training Foundation to improve maths and English support in the context of apprenticeship delivery. The protocols promote providers establish and maintain a relationship with employers that is mutually beneficial and therefore far more likely to be supportive of collaborative efforts to enhance an apprentice's learning journey. The protocols specifically address the development of maths and English skills, but will also be applicable, in a large part, to the wider vocational context.

We regard these protocols as necessary for the following reasons.

Employers should -	Providers too often -
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> expect to assume some responsibility for an apprentice's learning programme (particularly with regards to maths and English). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> unduly fear antagonising – and potentially losing – employer partnerships.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> expect a wider package of support services from the provider, beyond periodic reviews of the apprentice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> fail to see the potential mutual benefit in providing wider support (beyond apprenticeship delivery) to the employer.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not underestimate the value of an enriched apprenticeship experience in 'growing' future capability and high performance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> fail to communicate effectively with employers and, particularly, senior leaders to secure proactive and on-going apprenticeship support.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> establish effective guidelines for front-line supervisors or ensure they receive effective training. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> fail to ensure that those working at the interface with the employer (usually assessors) have sufficient confidence and skills to develop a value-added relationship.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> be more aware of the maths and English skills underpinning competence in the workplace. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> lack strategies to engage employers in effective planning, delivery and assessment of maths and English.

There are some excellent examples of employer-provider collaboration, and one aim of this project will be to locate and draw on examples of effective practice. However, Ofsted did identify some significant problems and were critical of, weaker provision that they found in one third of 45 providers visited [Ofsted \(2015, p.5\)](#).

*The weaker provision was characterised by a lack of collaboration between providers and employers to plan apprenticeships that gave apprentices the skills they needed. Apprentices' English and mathematics skills were often poorly developed. As well as stifling the career opportunities of these apprentices, this low-quality provision undermines the status of apprenticeships and devalues the brand. Employers and providers involved in poor quality, low-level apprenticeships are **wasting public funds and abusing the trust placed in them by government and the apprentices.***

[Ofsted \(2015\). Apprenticeships: developing skills for future prosperity, Crown ref:150129](#)

The [Sainsbury Report into Technical Education](#) and the government's response, set out in the [Post-16 Skills Plan \(2016, p.12\)](#) which states -

..... Fourthly, we need close integration between college-based and employment-based technical education so that employers and individuals can understand how they fit together and how to move from one to the other as seamlessly as possible.

The need for a more coherent and productive partnership between providers and employers in supporting apprenticeships and all variants of vocational education and training has been a continuing and persistent theme since the government publication, [New Challenges, New Chances \(2011\)](#) and, more recently, the Commission for Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning (CAVTL). Sir Frank McLoughlin, chair of the CAVTL group, writes in his [One Year On report \(2014\)](#) -

The more challenging agenda set out by the CAVTL report – the creation of a sustainable ‘VET system’ based on the ‘two-way street’ – has, rightly, been identified as a longer term priority by the Foundation, and one which will require a strong partnership approach – in particular between colleges and training providers, and employers. Implementation of the two-way street is at an early stage. It will not be firmly established without concerted action by BIS, the Foundation and the UK Commission to bring employers to the table. Colleges and providers have to build on their well-established links with employers, as well as reaching out to new employers – and there is increasing evidence that this is happening; and employers have to reach out too. Genuine collaboration should be encouraged and supported, not imposed, on either side. At this early stage, it requires on-going facilitation by BIS and the Foundation to avoid colleges, providers and employers reverting to previous polarities, and to help build new partnership arrangements.

The [Two-Way Street, Leadership Exchange Project](#), carried out by AELP and the Institute of Education, on behalf of the Education and Training Foundation, has produced a [set of resources and case studies](#) that provide an effective foundation for the current project. The following five Provider-Employer Protocols aim, over and above all, to support the ‘CAVTL two-way street’ in promoting and guiding collaboration between the key players supporting the apprentice. They extend the IoE-AELP prior Leadership Exchange work by offering operational strategies for realising the ambitions of the ‘two-way street’. They are based on two fundamental premises:

1. that employers will engage more collaboratively and effectively in supporting maths and English development in the workplace, if they place a high value on their relationship with the provider organisation;
2. that workplace mentors do not need to be experts in maths and English, or even confident in their own personal skills, in order to play an effective role in supporting the apprentice’s development in these skills.

They should be considered as **working hypotheses** to be evaluated/validated in practice and we are therefore seeking critical feedback from providers in the following areas:

- a) is the sense of each protocol clear?
- b) are the protocols realistic and capable of implementation?
- c) do the protocols add value to the relationship with employers?
- d) do the protocols impact positively on the quality of the apprentices learning in the workplace?
- e) have the protocols led to an improvement in the collaborative support for the apprentice’s development in maths and English?
- f) should other protocols be included?

1. Initiating, maintaining and enhancing the provider-employer relationship

1a. Good quality support for apprentices, in the workplace, is more likely where employers significantly value their relationship with the provider organisation and the potential for mutual business development.

Providers need to demonstrate to current and potential employers (of apprentices) how partnership in apprenticeship delivery can lead to wider cooperation for mutual benefit. This requires a **well-researched** understanding of an employer's core business together with its culture, workforce and strategic development needs, creating a solid foundation on which to build trust and mutual respect. For the provider, apprentice employers present opportunities for wider business development and enhanced quality assurance. Examples of mutually beneficial cooperation are described below.

Other things the provider could offer	Other ways for the employer to help
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wider staff development – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ training-needs analysis ○ professional development and updating ○ mentor/coach training • Additional services that are important to operations such as – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ health and safety checks ○ IT support ○ 'horizon scanning' for new policy, technologies, legislation, etc. - to support the employer's strategic planning • Tailoring of apprentice programme design and delivery to help meet organisational priorities • Staff exchanges and shadowing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting design of work-based projects • Supporting networked work-experience in specialist areas (for apprentices and own staff) • Bringing 'real-work' challenges into the classroom • Engagement in careers advice • Staff exchanges and shadowing • Support for apprentices' maths and English development in the workplace

1b. Provider-employer relationships are best enhanced through effective liaison between the right people, at the right levels.

It is not uncommon for senior leaders, having signed-off an apprenticeship agreement, to then release all responsibility for the apprentice, and their training programme, to a work-based supervisor or departmental manager. This can result in a 'disconnect' regarding the ethos and quality of apprenticeship provision. Providers should therefore ensure regular dialogue with the employer's senior management to:

- ensure the quality of operational support for the apprentice;
- foster partnership and mutual support, as described in Protocol 1a.

Assessors and other provider staff who regularly visit the apprentice in the workplace should use that opportunity to also:

- establish productive relationships with workplace mentors and managers;
- collect 'intelligence' for the provider on potential, additional business support to foster partnership and mutual support, as described in Protocol 1a;
- engage mentors and managers in both the design and delivery of the apprentices learning programme, both on and off-job (see Protocol 2).

It should be noted that effective practice in formative support for learners (apprentices) needs to include timely communication and feedback loops between the employer and the provider (as described in Protocol 3).

1c. Staff who liaise with employers need to have the necessary 'relationship skills'.

Providers need to ensure that staff who liaise with employers have the necessary skills and confidence to fulfil those roles. Relevant areas of competence will include:

- research skills leading to a well-informed awareness of the employer's business;
- an ability to explain the value of maths and English to the apprentice's future economic and social wellbeing, achievement of the apprenticeship programme and the employer's core business;
- an ability to 'map' work-experience opportunities, with the employer', and to suggest potential for enrichment for increased outcome efficiency, including maths and English (see also, Protocol 2);
- an ability to identify and make effective use of opportunities to build authentic and realistic learning opportunities, whether situated in 'real-work' or taken back into the classroom (see also, Protocol 2);
- effective interpersonal (or coaching) skills, including –
 - well-developed, active listening;
 - establishing goals and plans in terms of 'added value' (with an understanding of 'change' and strategies for 'resistance to change');
 - questioning techniques to support active listening and planning;
- a clear understanding of the wider support that can be offered by the provider.

It is particularly, important to consider who amongst the staff should initiate, maintain and enhance the relationship with the employer at senior levels. For example:

- is the assessor both confident and able to do this (as Protocol 1a.)?
- should you consider a team approach that involves someone with business development experience?

2. Collaborative Planning and Delivery of Learning

Involving the workplace and the apprentice in planning off-job learning increases its perceived value and supports collaborative delivery.

Apprentices may find it harder to engage with off-job, classroom-based learning compared with learning in the workplace – particularly in the context of maths and English. Involving the workplace and the apprentice in the planning of maths and English learning around authentic and realistic real-work (and real-life) situations, reinforces the value of maths and English, for all concerned. Maths teachers, for example, are sometimes concerned that they do not have the time or the vocational knowledge to plan contextualised learning and workplace supervisors are not always aware of the embedded maths and English skills.

Providers should consider whether this collaborative planning role should be the sole responsibility of the assessor or whether maths and English specialists should be directly or indirectly supporting this process. Key processes to consider include:

- 'mapping' vocational work experience to naturally occurring maths and English (as well as vocational) learning goals, early on in the apprentice's programme, and seeking the employer's support in enriching those opportunities to maximise outcomes;
- using Assessment for Learning*, diagnostically, in sync with real-work occurrences, ensuring a more meaningful and timely identification of individual need (see also Protocol 3);
- involving the workplace supervisor in support of Assessment for Learning* (see also Protocol 3);

- apprentices bringing real-work (and therefore contextualised) examples of maths/English into the classroom, to solve co-operatively - leading to skill transfer and deeper learning;
- balancing the demands of individualised learning support, based on workplace priorities, with delivery of group-based, off-job learning, is achievable through (for example) –
 - sharing individual, real-work challenges with the whole group (as above);
 - appointing (prior) ‘topic experts’ to peer support ‘topic novices’;
 - streaming into sub-groups, with or without changing membership, as needs dictate;
 - accepting that a ‘one-size fits all’ programme or Scheme of Work will not work effectively;
 - considering the possibility of negotiating work-based projects that add value for the employer whilst also addressing maths/English outcomes that are not occurring naturally.

* Note: Assessment for Learning does not involve testing of maths/English, as such; it is more concerned with whether the apprentice is coping or not with the maths/English demands of their work role. The difference is subtle but very important.

3. Collaborative Processes and Effective Communications

The core purpose of effective provider-workplace processes and communications should be to enable ‘on-demand’ or ‘as needs arise’ support for the apprentice.

Barriers to learning, caused by an underlying maths or English development need, can arise at any time and the provider must therefore be able to address that at any time. Waiting until a quarterly review to discover a (now historical) learning barrier has occurred, could damage the apprentice’s motivation, self-belief and self-esteem. It is essential, therefore, that critical learning-support needs can be communicated to the provider as soon as they arise within the workplace. Advances in digital and mobile technologies offer many ways to achieve this efficiently and effectively.

It should also be noted that ongoing monitoring and evaluation of learning is necessary, not only to ensure that learning barriers are identified in a timely manner, but also to ensure that reviews are meaningfully based on a valid record of learning progress (in contrast to the more usual, and less valid, retrospective monitoring and evaluation).

Examples of effective processes and communications include:

- a clear vision communicated to employers and relevant workplace staff regarding the value of maths and English in supporting economic and social effectiveness;
- a requirement for apprentices to maintain an electronic learning journal (proactively reinforced by workplace supervisors) to monitor and evaluate progress in maths and English as well as vocational and other wider skills;
- monitoring (by assessors?) and reviewing by subject-experts as issues arise;
- the support of workplace staff in referring on to provider staff when an apprentice is disengaging or struggling, possibly as a result of maths and English needs*.
- the use of mobile and digital technologies to support flexible and efficient communications and tracking between the provider and employer.

* It is important to note that a workplace mentor does not have to be expert, or even confident, in maths and/or English to be able to identify when this may be an issue for an apprentice – indeed, a mentor who is personally challenged by maths and English may be the person most likely to identify avoidance strategies.