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## TQS Part B

# Developing sector expertise for TQS Part B

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**Between September 2009 and March 2010** the LSIS World Class Skills programme supported providers to develop sector expertise. This included measuring their performance against the requirements of the Training Quality Standard (TQS) Part B.

### Introduction

This project explored providers' understanding of what is meant by developing their sector expertise and this included identifying areas in which they could improve. Providers used the TQS Part B framework as a basis for assessing their current level of expertise. This report contains the key learning points arising from the work of three groups of providers working geographically across the country.

#### Who is it for?

This report is aimed at providers who wish to understand what is required to be a specialist in their chosen sector.

#### What will they gain from it?

The aim of this document is to:

- Share the experiences and learning of the providers who participated;
- Enable an understanding of how other providers might tackle a similar project; and
- Provide tips about the steps to take to become recognised as a sector specialist.

### Project background

In September 2009, the LSIS World Class Skills programme invited providers to participate in a project to explore how they could develop and improve their provision as providers to their chosen sector.

The project was lead by TQS practitioners supported by business improvement facilitators. Specifically, the support offered:

- A series of five workshops delivered over six months on topics critical to participants;
- Access to up to five days of one-to-one consultancy to support implementation;
- The opportunity to work with sector peers;
- Access to facilitators with knowledge and experience of the Training Quality Standard; and
- Signposting to relevant sector information and guidance.

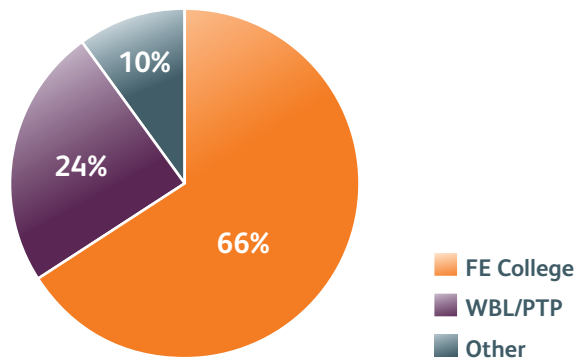
“The support has helped me to focus on priorities – strategy! The consultants have each brought their own experiences, skills and knowledge to all of the stages of this journey.”

Jacqui Banks, Employer Engagement Manager, North Yorkshire County Council

## Participants

The World Class Skills team worked with 29 providers delivering to a wide range of sectors. Each provider confirmed the commitment of their senior management team to continuous improvement and to developing their sector expertise before starting the project. A breakdown of the participating providers is shown in the following diagram:

**Figure 1: Participating providers by type**



Source: KPMG LLP (UK)

“The impact of the WCS project on our College has been significant. This is the first time in over two years that detailed information has been given at this level on the TQS assessment. The issues raised at the information sessions have shown us that we have to approach this area from a whole college perspective. This has given rise to several challenges, as the College at present does not have systems to demonstrate our sector expertise.”

Sue Harwood, Head of Curriculum, Lambeth College

“As a result of the support provided by the WCS programme, the College has been able to position itself, through a better understanding of the requirements of what it means to have sector expertise, in order to prepare its application for Part B.”

Marie Harris, Director of Employer Services, Central Sussex College

## Aims

The aim was to support providers in their ambitions to raise the quality of services provided to their chosen sector by:

- Building a common understanding of the TQS Part B requirements in order to develop sector expertise;
- Helping providers to understand their current level of expertise;
- Developing action plans to improve their policies, practices and procedures;
- Examining and discussing alternative practices that could be of benefit; and
- Sharing the practice and experiences of other providers.

## Key Activities

**Workshop 1** – familiarised participants with what it means to be a sector expert including undertaking an analysis of their current position against the TQS Part B Standard and producing an action plan.

**Workshop 2** – focused on understanding the sector and drew out the difference between being a provider of training and having expertise in the sector.

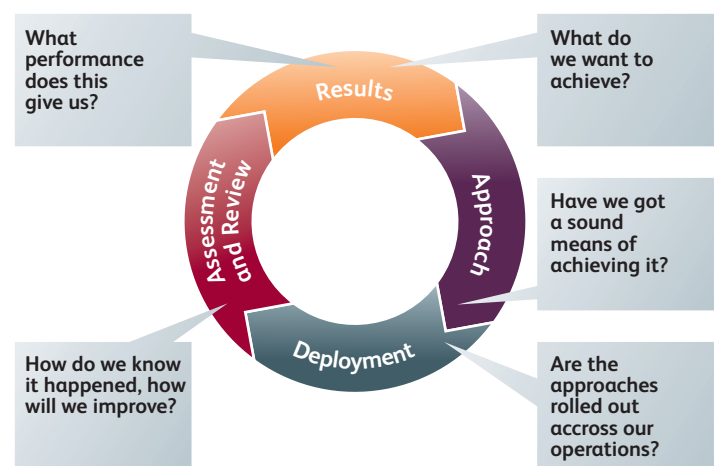
**Workshop 3** – highlighted the importance of and provided potential approaches to developing a sector strategy.

**Workshop 4** – demonstrated how to turn plans into actions and track their progress, including exploring the need for measuring performance in relation to specific objectives.

**Workshop 5** – highlighted how to bring their findings together into an application for TQS Part B through developing an understanding of the process of certification.

Providers found the following tool useful to support them in identifying their improvement opportunities:

**Figure 2: RADAR® logic used to improve**



Source: RADAR® logic used in conjunction with the EFQM® Excellence Model

For further details, please go to: [www.efqm.org](http://www.efqm.org)

## Challenges

The participants faced a number of challenges in developing their sector expertise. These fell into two main areas:

### Development

- Shifting from being exclusively learner focused to also being employer and sector focused.
- Securing management sign-off for participation and maintaining ongoing commitment to introducing new ideas.
- Balancing spending time on developing sector expertise and the TQS Part B application with day to day role responsibilities.

### Performance

- Where Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems were available, they were often not configured to track the full employer journey, especially in terms of reporting the impact of training interventions on employers.
- Monitoring the performance of processes to ensure that they are aligned to the needs of the sector.
- Delivering quality provision in a recession whilst experiencing funding caps, political uncertainty and budget cuts.

## Impact

The benefits of participating in the programme include:

### Awareness

- A clearer understanding of the areas providers need to improve by completing a self assessment against the TQS criteria.
- Increased awareness of the need to develop sector expertise across the whole organisation and buy-in from senior staff.
- Increased awareness of available sources of sector information that can be used to inform delivery.

### Planning and delivery

- Employer responsive sector strategies have been developed that align to overall provider strategies.
- Organisational changes have taken place to better support and drive forward an employer and sector focused approach.
- More relevant delivery has resulted from better understanding of sector needs, which has led to increased customer satisfaction.
- Processes have been implemented to allow providers to react more quickly to the changing needs of employers.
- Better quality applications for TQS Part B.
- Communication and business impact plans have been used to ensure that stakeholders are kept up to date.

## Provider case study

### Abingdon & Witney College

The college employer responsive work is driven by an off site business development and innovation team. Before joining the programme they did not utilise employer feedback to examine whether their delivery was aligned to employers' needs or to inform future delivery.

Participating in the WCS project has enabled the unit to develop and embed a business strategy and plan, which links to the main strategic plan of the college. The college recognised the need to focus on Part A of the TQS across the college and follow this with a Part B application to demonstrate their sector specialist expertise.

As part of its development the college established employer feedback protocols and built these into product development, ensuring that what they were delivering fully met the needs of employers.

Participating in the project has enabled them to appreciate the positive impact on their performance that developing sector expertise can have. They have also become a more proactive client facing organisation through engaging with their clients in a more focused, innovative and forward thinking way.

Having reflected on the project, the college better understands that their culture was typically driven by available funding and they now realise that they need to focus more on income generation. They recognise that they can achieve this by identifying employers' needs and developing more responsive programmes with more flexible delivery methods.

## Top tips

The participants in the programme offered the following insights for providers who wish to enhance their sector expertise:

- Start with a high level gap analysis of your business using the TQS framework.
- You will need to keep up to date with changes in legislation, technology and employer working practices to ensure that you are providing flexible and relevant solutions.
- Obtain accurate sector specific market information and utilise this to develop short and long term strategies for meeting employers' needs.
- Review your strategic aims and operational targets to ensure your sector focus remains true.
- Ensure that you have the right people and other resources in place to support the effective delivery of the strategy.
- Monitor your performance to ensure strategies and processes make an impact.
- If you decide to apply for TQS Part B certification, ensure your organisation has Part A first. Be clear on the cross-over and linkages to Part A.
- Talk with providers who have been through the process of seeking TQS certification.

“The group environment and meeting other providers in the same position has given me thinking time away from the pressures of work and allowed me to see the ‘wood for the trees’. In addition, the peer support has been excellent for sharing good practice.”

Amanda Petrie, Assistant Director/Head of Retail,  
New College Nottingham

“Working towards robust employer responsive activity has meant that we, as an organisation, have worked together more closely to rationalize our processes and procedures and, as a result, have become more effective in the use of our resources.”

Andree Deane, Communications Director,  
The Skills Partnership

## What's next for you?

Based on the experiences of the participants in this project, there are some key areas to consider to understand better your position in respect of developing your sector expertise:

### Checklist

- Do you have a specific strategy that clearly defines what you are aiming to achieve in relation to the sector?
- Does this strategy clearly reflect how you will address the key sector issues?
- Do you have buy in to your approach to delivery from the senior management team and wider staff?
- Do you use information from Sector Skills Councils?
- Are you clear on what the key sector issues and priorities are and where your service offer is impacting on these?
- Have you assessed your current approach against the needs of the sector and have you put in place an action plan to close the gaps?
- Do you have clear measures of progress in place that align with what you set out to achieve in your strategy?
- Can you evidence what you do, why you do it and what impact it has on the sector?
- Do you know how you are perceived by your employers?
- Do you use feedback from employers and stakeholders to continually develop new products and services to meet the emerging needs of the sector?

## Get in touch

For more information on the WCS programme, please go to [www.excellencegateway.org.uk/wcs](http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/wcs)

Specialist Part B guidance can be downloaded from the Training Quality Standard website.

<http://www.trainingqualitystandard.co.uk/partbguidance01>