

# Making the most of the QCF

## Case Study



### **Project title: Developing life and work skills through accrediting experience in the work place**

A programme developed in collaboration with Job Centre Plus (JCP) to provide learners with experience of the work place to put them in a stronger position to gain employment.

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

- Employability skills
- Partnership working with JCP
- Accrediting experience in the workplace

### **Contact information**

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#### **Participating organisation:**

West Sussex County Council, Adult and Community Learning Service.

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

In collaboration with Job Centre Plus (JCP), the provider set out to develop a six-week programme for unemployed young adults that would give them the opportunity and skills to explore different progression avenues whether that is to a job, further learning or self-employment. The provider wished to ensure that all learners on the programme had access to a real experience of the workplace.

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

West Sussex ACL has developed excellent relations with JCP both at county level and with local advisors. JCP staff understand the provider's offer and its potential impact on the unemployed, referring learners on a regular basis and maintaining regular contact.

The programme begins with a one-day induction, which includes an element of information, advice and guidance (IAG), and then, for five weeks, learners work 4 days a week in one of the six West Sussex Adult and Community Learning offices and spend one day a week with their tutor in the classroom receiving teaching and learning

support and consolidating their learning from the workplace.

Learners complete an employability qualification; the City and Guilds Level 1 Award in Employability and Personal Development. They also complete a one-week intensive European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) course as strong and identifiable IT skills are essential in the workplace. Most of the young adults who are referred to the provider have used computers and other technology in school, college and, in some cases, university but do not always have a formal qualification. The goal is that all learners complete Level 1 ECDL and that a significant percentage also complete the Level 2 qualification. The provider has built in a one-week extension to the programme for those learners who need extra time to complete their IT and / or the employability assessments.

Recruitment to the programme is matched to the placements available with JCP making the initial recommendations. The course tutor then interviews each learner individually to identify their skills requirements, ensure that they fully understand the nature of the programme and to discuss the intended outcomes.

To date, three cohorts of learners have completed the six-week programme and a fourth is underway. The learners, who are aged between 18 and 24, have ranged from those with low-level skills to those who have no experience of the work place but cannot access other training because they already hold a degree.

*“It has been an absolute pleasure to work with WSCC Adult Education Department on this project. They have offered up an excellent, high quality opportunity for our young customers who have benefited immensely from participating.”*

*(JCP)*

There has been a high rate of retention and achievement. Learner achievements so far (including the fourth cohort) are:

- 89% have completed the training and placement;
- 74% have completed (or have due for submission) portfolios for the employability qualification;
- 84% have achieved ECDL Level 1;
- 68% have achieved ECDL Level 2.

Drop-outs have been due to personal circumstances (illness or family problems) or through obtaining a paying job. Some learners elected to finish their ECDL in their own time where they had not completed the assessment within the week's intensive training during their placement.

While there have been some teething problems due to learners changing every six weeks, staff in the ACL offices now appreciate the benefits of the programme and the different perspectives that the learners bring. Support systems are in place with clear

lines of responsibility for integrating learners into the work of the office. Learners do not cover for existing posts but provide additional resource to enable the ACL office to do things it would not necessarily have done. For example, two learners have carried out a review of the website and presented a report to the Communications Department to inform its future development.

*“Being part of the work experience programme has brought a more youthful balance to the office. The young people have been very enthusiastic and have had a dynamic approach to work and the training provided.”*

*(Centre Programme Supervisor)*

Feedback from the initial cohorts has already led to changes to the structure of the programme. Originally the ECDL programme was scheduled for week 6 but, in future, it will take place during week 1. This will enable learners to practise the skills they have acquired in a real office environment. Further changes to the units on offer are planned to better reflect individual learner need.

Learners are very positive about their experience, and tutors report a significant growth in self-confidence and an improvement in communication skills, for example, the confidence to engage with customers on the phone. At the end of the programme, in addition to achieving the two qualifications, learners receive a reference which puts them in a strong position to gain employment.

*“It is really exciting witnessing the journey that the young adults take while with us for such a short time. They start off often shy and lacking confidence or self-esteem then finish their placement and training with us smiling more, with more confidence, more self-esteem and with ambition again!”*

*(Lead tutor)*

Informal feedback suggests that learners are progressing to further training and to employment including apprenticeships. One learner has started up his own business and another has returned to do an initial teacher training course.

*“It was a really enjoyable experience at West Sussex Adult and Community Learning. I had a routine again, regained a lot of my confidence and even went on afterwards to start my PTLLS so I can teach myself in the future.”*

*(Learner)*

### **What still needs to done**

At present, information on learner progression from the programme is gathered informally through conversations with either JCP advisors or the learners themselves. The provider now needs to develop more formal ways of capturing learner progression.

Currently the provider can only cater for six learners per cohort. They would like to expand the programme but do not have the capacity for additional placements. They want to investigate partnerships with other employers in the region who might be able to offer placements.

The course tutors wish to review the units on offer and their approach to assessment. To date, the qualification on offer has two mandatory units leaving time for only one optional unit. The awarding organisation has relaxed the rules of combination so the tutors are now looking at how to make the unit offer more flexible, particularly considering the diverse range of abilities demonstrated by learners accessing the programme. They also want to capture evidence of all achievement, whether in the classroom or in the workplace, through a broader range of evidence.

### **What the provider wants to share with the sector**

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

- Course information leaflet for Business Skills Level 1 Award.
- Evidence requirements tracking document for Level 1 Award in Employability and Enterprise.

### **Key learning points**

- To succeed, a project needs to be of mutual benefit to all partners: JCP, the provider, the work placement organisation and the learner.
- A two-pronged approach to working with JCP is most effective. The provider should have a central point of contact with JCP at county level and regular contact with local advisors.
- A coordinated approach to working with JCP leads to referrals to other faculties where the initial referral is not suitable. This has worked particularly successfully as the service has been restructured in a way that gives key staff a better overview of provision across the service.
- It is essential to have a coordinator within the provider who has an overview of the whole programme and is the focal point for learners, JCP and work placement staff.
- Placing learners in council offices needs careful planning particularly as the workload in the offices is not even across the year and staff are under pressure. Any organisation hosting work placements will need to be able to invest time and their staff will need training to supervise the learners.
- It is important to think through the practicalities of placing learners in a real working environment, for example, access to IT and password creation and having sufficient

work space. To ensure that there are no data protection issues, learners need to be in a controlled environment. They must be supervised at all times as it is not practical to carry out CRB checks on the learners.

- The programme needs to build in time for learners to meet their other commitments, for example, signing on and must recognise wider implications, for example, travelling to work.
- Don't be frightened to take the first step and then revise the programme so that it better meets learner needs once it is underway.
- Initial, and ongoing, advice and guidance from tutors has proved essential to the success of the programme.