ABOUT THE KEY SKILLS SUPPORT PROGRAMME

These materials have been produced as part of the Key Skills Support Programme (KSSP).

The Key Skills Support Programme is funded by the Department for Education and Skills. Its main purpose is to help practitioners in training providers, schools and colleges to improve the quality of key skills and Skills for Life provision and to support the preparation of young people for the key skills qualifications.

DfES has appointed Learning for Work to manage the programme for the work-based route, and to work with those actively involved in the field to:

- improve the confidence and competence of teachers and trainers to deliver key skills and Skills for Life
- help a wide range of key skills and Skills for Life practitioners through a programme of events and training courses
- provide best practice materials for practitioners, employers and managers
- support practitioners as they foster progression from Skills for Life to key skills and other forms of learning.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- **Writers**: Peter Clitheroe and John Meed
- **Other members of the development team**: Eddy Knasel, Rob Martin and Anna Rossetti
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*Building key skills portfolios CD*
Welcome to this toolkit on working with employers.

Effective employer engagement is vital to any work-based learning programme. So much learning takes place on the job that it is crucial to identify employers who are committed to supporting learning to help both learners and companies get the maximum benefit from their studies. This is particularly important for key skills and Skills for Life, as these sets of skills help people develop the skills necessary to get a job and to keep a job and progress at work.

Providers need to encourage staff throughout their organisations to understand the potential benefit of involving business and industry and to take individual responsibility for developing and sustaining relationships with employers.

D. Macleod & M. Hughes, *What we know about working with employers* (LSDA 2005)

This toolkit is designed for anyone in work-based learning providers who works with employers, including those who make initial contact with employers and those who support learners throughout their programmes.

**WHAT THE TOOLKIT CONTAINS**

The toolkit contains a range of resources organised into the following sections:
The complete contents are available on the CD-ROM (attached to the inside front cover of the toolkit folder), which also contains copies of the following resources:

- **Writing and using assignments** – a booklet giving detailed instructions on how to use the *Writing and using assignments* CD
- **Building key skills portfolios** – a booklet giving detailed instructions on how to use the *Building key skills portfolios* CD

In addition, the toolkit contains the following two CDs (attached to the inside back cover of the toolkit folder):

- **Writing and using assignments CD**
- **Building key skills portfolios CD**

**USING THE TOOLKIT**

The toolkit isn’t designed to provide a total system to replace everything you do now. We hope it will give you ideas about how you can improve what you do already, and tools and techniques to enable you to do this.

Bear the following in mind as you plan how to use the toolkit.

- **The guidance** pages contain suggestions for how you can work with employers; it may make sense to start by reading these.
- **The resource** pages contain tools that you can use in your work with employers. For example, there is an interview protocol in the first section that you can use when you first meet an employer, while the section on supporting learners contains a card sort that you can use to help employers identify ways of improving the support they provide.
- **The case study** pages provide examples of interesting practice from other providers.
- **Involve** everyone who has contact with employers – both those who arrange placements and those who support and assess learners in the workplace. For example, at an early stage you could carry out the force-field analysis described in the first section as a team activity.
- **You don’t have to use everything** – **select** the bits you need that complement and improve what you do already.
HOW THE TOOLKIT RESOURCES MAY HELP

There is a range of resources in this toolkit. This page gives an overview of how you might be able to use each one.

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<td>Identify what it is about your very best employer that means they provide the finest on-job learning</td>
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<td><strong>EXPLAINING KEY SKILLS AND SKILLS FOR LIFE TO EMPLOYERS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lines of interaction</td>
<td>Clarify the roles and the interactions that have to occur to enable the placement to be effective for both the learner and the employer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking the right language</td>
<td>Explore the words and phrases you and your employers use and consider how you can make sure your language is as appropriate as possible</td>
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<td>Key skills and Apprenticeships – the employer’s role</td>
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<tr>
<td>Logbook</td>
<td>Feed the learner’s early experiences at work into the initial assessment process</td>
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**SUPPORTING LEARNERS**

| Supporting learners card sort and record sheet | Identify ways in which employers can increase their support of skills development |
| Writing and using assignments CD (at back of folder) | Plan workplace assignments |
| Building key skills portfolios CD (at back of folder) | Identify opportunities for learning and assessment in the workplace |

**BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH EMPLOYERS**

| Identifying ways forward | Consider how you might make existing and new services available to existing and new employers |
| Increasing employer contributions | Re-examine the contributions that employers make to learning and the services you offer to them |
Employers have a central role in work-based training to help ensure that companies experience the benefit of staff developing their skills and knowledge.

Key skills put the emphasis very firmly on application – applying skills and knowledge to everyday situations and challenges at work. This means that learners must be able to develop, practise and gather evidence for key skills through work, with the active support of their workplace supervisors.

This section contains guidance on:

• The role of employers
• Clarifying what you want from employers
• Profiling your employers
• Using force-field analysis

and the following resources:

• Taking stock
• What you need from employers and offer in return
• Interview protocol
• Force-field analysis
• Case study: Broadland Council Training Services
THE ROLE OF EMPLOYERS

Employers can support learning and assessment in many ways. These are five of the most important.

**IDENTIFYING HOW SKILLS WILL BE APPLIED AT WORK**

Individuals learn best when they have meaningful workplace activities that they recognise as important parts of their work. Employers are often the best-placed people to identify those activities that provide opportunities for learning and assessing key skills and that benefit the company. They can also identify additional tasks that the learner could tackle which help to demonstrate the value and purpose of key skills.

**DEMONSTRATING THAT THEY ACTIVELY VALUE THE KEY SKILLS**

It’s vital that everyone who works with learners knows why skills are important. If employers are positive or negative about key skills, this will rub off on learners. So it is crucial that both managers and supervisors know about the skills and are able to show how they are important at work.

**PROVIDING WORKPLACE COACHING**

The best workplace supervisors are also good coaches. They know how to support learners, give feedback, set challenges and generally help people learn. As the people who may spend most time with learners, they are well placed to help them learn new skills and have the opportunity to practise and apply them.

**SUPPORTING AND TAKING PART IN RECORDING AND ASSESSMENT**

Employers can also help learners to gather and record key skills evidence. To do this effectively, however, they need to have an idea of the standards required – for example, a witness testimony will only be useful if the supervisor providing it is familiar with the requirements of the unit(s).

**SUPPORTING TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT IN PRACTICAL WAYS**

Finally, employers can provide practical support to training providers – and may be contractually obliged to do so. This may involve arranging facilities for trainers and assessors to visit learners on site. It may also involve releasing learners for off-job training.
THE NEED TO SELECT EMPLOYERS

Employers therefore clearly have a crucial role in supporting skills development. However, experience suggests that they do not always play this role to the full. Why is this?

There can be several reasons why employers don’t fully support skills development.

• They may not know about key skills or Skills for Life.
• They may not know that the skills are part of the learner’s programme.
• They may not see the links between skills and the business, and how they can lead to economies in their companies through fewer errors or improved communication and ICT use.
• They may be concerned about the time and resources required.
• They may lack certain skills themselves.
• Some employers may be attracted to taking on learners, not to develop their skills but to get around paying the minimum wage. Those same employers are unlikely to recognise any responsibility for helping learners develop.

In practice, employers who are demanding or expecting ‘something for nothing’ have no place in government-funded programmes. Experience indicates that the majority of employers are prepared to become engaged when they see the real benefits for their organisation and are clear about what is on offer, what is expected of them and why.

So it is vital to:

• inform and involve employers fully
• make sure that they are aware of the support they will need to give to learners – including key skills learning opportunities
• demonstrate how learners with key skills can benefit the business.
TAKEING STOCK

Take a moment to think of your very best employer who provides the finest on-job learning. Think how it would be to have all of your workplace training working as well as that! What are the features that characterise great ‘placements’?

Use this space to note a few of the characteristics that make your best employer so good.
CLARIFYING WHAT YOU WANT FROM EMPLOYERS

Part of the process of reaching a mutually beneficial agreement entails taking steps to ensure that employers understand both the benefits of involvement with key skills or Skills for Life and the level of commitment that is required of them.

In identifying what you want from employers you must consider the big picture – the blend of employers you need – as well as what you require from individual managers and workplace supervisors.

WHAT DO YOU NEED FROM YOUR BLEND OF EMPLOYERS?

At the broad level, you should build a profile of what key skill opportunities you need in which occupational areas and at which levels. You will also have to consider the varied levels of support and encouragement that different young people will need from employers.

WHAT DO YOU NEED FROM WORKPLACE MANAGERS?

Take a little time to draw up a list of what the manager should contribute to making the placement a success. Ideally, do this as a team activity, including skills specialists as well as employer liaison colleagues.

You could then divide this list into:

- **essential items** that are needed for the arrangement to work – both the opportunities to develop and assess the key skills, and the knowledge and understanding that employers and their staff should have to make these opportunities available to young people and to ensure that individual placements work

- **desirable items** – things that might be described as the icing on the cake which make an acceptable placement into something rather special.

Don’t be afraid to list everything that can help all aspects of skills implementation in the workplace. You will then have both a checklist of basic criteria for placements and a wish list of added value factors that can be raised as appropriate with each to get the maximum benefit for all concerned. Having established the requirements, you will be in a strong position to select the most effective employers.
HOW COULD WORKPLACE SUPERVISORS BECOME INVOLVED TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THE LEARNING?

Workplace supervisors have a vital role in making workplace learning effective. Their role in key skills is no different. Supervisors and their staff can offer valuable support, perhaps in the forms of coaching, encouragement, and awareness of practical opportunities for key skills development, application and evidence.

WHAT CAN YOU OFFER EMPLOYERS?

You also have a lot to offer employers.

• The standards describe a broad range of generic skills, knowledge and even attitudes that employers have been asking of their employees for many years.

• The key skill and NVQ standards can be valuable to employers in auditing skills deficiencies and availability in their organisation. They can also help target training where it is needed.

• In addition, employers could have access to your expertise in explaining and highlighting the application of those standards in their organisation, so helping them to greater efficiency and profitability.

You could probably add to this list. And don’t forget that a lot of people, including employers, get a real buzz from helping young people to become all that they might be.

Draw up a list of what you can offer to employers with regard to key skills. You might well start from the main features of key skills, but don’t allow your thinking to stop there. When you are putting together your case for key skills, you will need to move beyond the features and into the benefits and make very clear the link between key skills standards and workplace competences.

It makes sense to consider the needs of both the manager (who makes decisions about whether to get involved in funded programmes and key skills at all) and the workplace supervisor (who has day-to-day involvement with the young person). Their needs and the nature of their involvement will probably be very different. Here are a few ideas to start you off – add as many as you can think of.

• The manager could be particularly interested in the business case for key skills, developing more effective and responsible staff or just the ‘feel good’ factor.

• Supervisors could be enthused by the prospect of effective learners making life easier, key skills opportunities for the supervisor or team development through the key skills.
WHAT YOU NEED FROM EMPLOYERS AND OFFER IN RETURN

Here are a few items to get you started. Add your own points to the lists.

### WHAT DO YOU NEED FROM WORKPLACE MANAGERS?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essential</th>
<th>Desirable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access to learner for training and assessment</td>
<td>Support to ensure that supervisors cooperate with review staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### HOW COULD WORKPLACE SUPERVISORS BE INVOLVED?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essential</th>
<th>Desirable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for learner to apply skills learnt</td>
<td>Pointing out key skill content of workplace tasks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO OFFER EMPLOYERS AND SUPERVISORS?

Expertise in workplace training and coaching which can be passed on to supervisors.
PROFILING YOUR EMPLOYERS

It is just too easy to use the word ‘employers’ as a very vague, catch-all term. You will know that employers can be as varied as learners. They each have distinctive needs, opportunities and preferences as well as varying in size, sector and approaches to learning. Just as you need to be aware of your learners, you need to be aware of your employers.

A starting point for establishing that awareness may be to build a profile of your employers to give a picture of what is involved, what they want and what they have to offer. You may decide to sample from those employers with whom you are already working. If you are in need of new placements, you might widen the profile to include a sample of other employers.

WHAT DO YOUR EMPLOYERS KNOW ABOUT KEY SKILLS AND SKILLS FOR LIFE?

To help you to pitch any information you provide at the right level so that you avoid the risks of patronising or talking over their heads, it is important to establish what employers already know about the skills.

HOW ACCURATE IS WHAT YOUR EMPLOYERS ‘KNOW’?

Part of the profiling process is to check out whether what employers ‘know’ about the skills is true! It is important to check employers’ understanding by asking open, jargon-free questions, such as ‘What particular skills, knowledge and attitudes are you looking for when you recruit staff?’, rather than relying on closed questions, such as ‘Do you know enough about key skills?’

HOW RECEPTIVE AND COMMITTED ARE YOUR EMPLOYERS?

The level to which your employers are committed to skills development will vary. It will be affected partly by the nature of any existing relationship you have with them, and partly by their current perceptions both of what key skills are about (including the misconceptions) and the value of those skills to their business.

The results of your assessment will determine the scale of the challenge before you! There is no point in charging at an open door. Equally, if an employer is not interested, it may be because you have made a weak case. The employer should be seen as a customer of the training service provided.
USING THE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The Interview protocol lists some of the areas that could be explored and within which you will need to frame your own questions. Most importantly, use supplementary questions to help ‘drill down’ to reveal genuine detail about the employer – especially about specific experience and attitudes to key skills and learning in general.

There are a lot of questions on the protocol. You don’t always need to use all of them, depending on the answers you have received. You do need to keep alert, listen to answers and ask follow-up questions whenever necessary. Part of your role is to be interested and to show the employer that you are interested in the business and are not just ticking boxes on a survey form.

Before meeting the employer, you should have established most of the basic information about the business, including such items as products, services and unique selling points, etc. Your interest in the business will invariably be appreciated and you are much more likely to get a positive response.

A number of the questions listed in the protocol are relatively simple. You will invariably want to ask supplementary questions (following up on the initial answer) to dig a bit deeper.

Here are some examples.

- If training has worked well or badly for the employer in the past, you might follow up with questions about why that was, whether it was a specific subject area or style of training that had led to benefits or difficulties, what else was going on at the time, etc.
- When talking about what the employer looks for when recruiting, you might explore explicit and implied references to qualifications, experience, main key skills and wider key skills.
- When finding out about promotion within the company, explore any links with competence in the job and find out whether this is measured by qualifications, experience, main key skills, wider key skills.

Remember that interviewing is more than just asking the questions: you need to listen carefully to responses and ask about anything you don’t understand. You are going through this process to find out important information about the way in which the company operates and to spot opportunities to build a successful relationship. This is not the opportunity to open the suitcase and tell the employer what they need – you haven’t (and certainly the employer hasn’t) justified this yet.
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

• My understanding of what you do is this – is there anything else?

• What are the characteristics (gender, experience, age, etc.) of the people you employ?

• What skills and qualifications do employees have? How do they achieve these?

• Do you have any potential skills shortages? What help would you welcome with these?

• What kinds of on- and off-job training do you currently provide?

• What do you know about the key skills and Skills for Life qualifications?

• What support do you currently provide for skills development?

• What do you look for when recruiting staff?

• Are qualifications mandatory in your company/industry?

• What do you look for when promoting staff?

• Are there currently any gaps in the skills and knowledge that you need staff to have to do the job?

• Do you predict any gaps in skills and knowledge that your staff will need to do the job in the future?

• When has training worked well for your company in the past?

• Are there instances when training has not worked well for your company?
HINT: If you find yourself stuck for a question, you might like to remember Kipling’s poem, which has served journalists well for many years:

I keep six honest serving-men  
(They taught me all I knew);  
Their names are What and Why and When  
And How and Where and Who.

Rudyard Kipling – Just So Stories (1902)
USING FORCE-FIELD ANALYSIS

Force-field analysis is a tool that can be applied to organisational change. It is used to compare where you are now with where you want to be – in this case to working relationships with your employers.

The principle behind force-field analysis says that:

• an organisation (or an individual) is subject to opposing forces, some of which help change and others that hinder change

• movement is dependent upon modifying these opposing forces: you can increase the helping forces or decrease the hindering forces – or both!

• once the change is complete, the forces can be brought back into balance again to hold the organisation where it wants to be – for example, by embedding the changes in new procedures and quality assurance systems.

Force-field analysis involves drawing these forces to give a visual picture of what is helping and hindering change. As different forces can be big or small, long-term or short-term, they are drawn with thicker or longer arrows to show their relative strengths. Here’s a worked example from a training provider:

Being able to see those forces is a great help in planning how to achieve change. When you are aware of the forces, you can plan activity to weaken or remove hindering forces and strengthen helping forces. You might also be able to introduce new helping forces to shift the organisation in the right direction.
HOW TO CARRY OUT A FORCE-FIELD ANALYSIS

Here’s how you do the Force-field analysis. Note that doing it as a team can help build a shared understanding of what factors are at play, where the organisation needs to move to and how the movement will be achieved.

1 Where do you want to be? Take a few minutes to describe, as clearly as you can, the characteristics of really effective working relationships with employers. How will it be when the relationship is working really well?

2 Where are you now? Focus on your working relationships with employers and see if you can identify all the helping and hindering forces. Label the force arrows on your chart, showing strong forces with long/thick arrows and weaker forces with shorter/thinner arrows.

Keep going to identify as many forces as you can. You may find that some factors both help and hinder. Some might directly oppose one another while others appear to act as free agents, adding their weight to one side or the other.

You should find that the chart is a useful representation of how you see the current situation. If working as a team, try to agree about the forces at work.

Now that you have a clear view of the current situation, you can give some thought to what you might do to achieve a shift in the right direction.

3 What can you do to build helping forces? Think as broadly as you can about existing forces that you can strengthen and about new helping forces that you could bring into play. Sometimes, a relatively simple action can build or strengthen a helping force and could even, at the same time, cancel out a hindering force. Just make notes of possible actions to build helping forces.

4 What can you do to weaken the hindering forces that are holding you back? Some of your hindering forces may look pretty daunting. Sometimes, factors such as ‘limited available funding’ show up. In this case, there is probably little that you can do to change that force in the short term; so don’t spend a lot of time trying to tackle it head-on. You might be better advised to go for a few relatively simple ‘easy-wins’ first. Again, make notes of possible actions to weaken hindering forces.

5 Draft action plan. You can now consider the outcomes of your force-field analysis to compile a draft action plan that will prioritise activities to strengthen helping forces and weaken hindering forces and so create the right conditions to achieve the change you are after.
FORCE-FIELD ANALYSIS

HELPING FORCES

HINDERING FORCES

EMPLOYERS IN WORK-BASED LEARNING
BROADLAND COUNCIL TRAINING SERVICES

Broadland Council Training Services (BCTS) is part of Broadland District Council’s business development unit in Norwich. Retail operations, local government, administration, equestrian, customer service and accountancy training are offered on its foundation, Apprenticeship and business training programmes. Contracted employers include Broadland District Council, equine establishments, retail outlets and other small to medium-sized enterprises.

BCTS maximises its approach to employers by promoting key skills, appropriate staff development and effective communication with employers.

PROMOTING KEY SKILLS TO EMPLOYERS

Sharon Money, Centre Manager at BCTS, and the whole team promote key skills to employers as an important and integral part of training programmes. ‘Holistic approach to frameworks’ and ‘embedding key skills in vocational learning’ are phrases they use to describe the BCTS approach to training.

Sharon stresses that this approach can help develop a learner who is an all-rounder: someone who can communicate with customers, present information, analyse sales figures and work as part of a team.

Sarah Abbs, who leads the equine programme, is able to give a specific example to employers of how a key skills project helped a company save money. The project identified that the company was over-ordering one type of feed. They were then able to adjust purchases, which had a positive effect on cash flow.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Staff at BCTS also achieve key skills and this means that they have firsthand knowledge of the qualifications and are better able to promote the whole framework to employers and embed key skills learning in the main programme.
BCTS recognises that the employer is best placed to help learners progress and achieve. They have worked with two of their key employers, John Oliver Hair Academy and Redwing Horse Sanctuary, to help staff gain the assessor and coaching awards from the Learning and Development NVQ. This has benefits all round: learners have access to staff at work who can plan, develop and assess their learning, and BCTS has on-site and committed people who want to contribute to the learners’ success.

**COMMUNICATION WITH EMPLOYERS**

Keeping employers informed helps build successful partnerships. BCTS has a ‘plain English’ guide spelling out what they expect from employers, and all employers sign a work experience agreement. Reviews, which employers contribute to, take place more frequently at the beginning of placements, so any problems or misunderstandings can be ironed out. Employers are invited to open days and awards evenings.

Looking to the future, Sharon is already keeping employers informed about functional skills development. And, as chair of the Norfolk WBL network, she is working with other networks in the East of England to develop a regional code of conduct for working with employers.
EXPLAINING KEY SKILLS AND SKILLS FOR LIFE TO EMPLOYERS

There are many possible ways of approaching employers to secure their active involvement in developing and evidencing key skills and/or Skills for Life. However, success seems much more likely where thought goes into planning activities that are appropriate to the individual employer and their workplace.

The most frequent activities include briefing meetings, phone calls, visits, mail-shots and questionnaires. However, while these have been successful in some circumstances, they have fallen flat in other cases. One consistent characteristic of successful approaches is personal contact. The most sustained improvements appear to come from a ‘drip-feed’ approach of regular contact and relationship building with employers rather than blanket marketing or pestering.

This section contains guidance on:

- Approaching employers
- Informing managers and supervisors about key skills
- Working together
- Using the Employer’s role booklet

and the following resources:

- Lines of interaction
- Speaking the right language
- Key skills and Apprenticeships – the employer’s role
- Case study: Way to Work, Twickenham
APPROACHING EMPLOYERS

When planning your approach to employers, you need to distinguish between new and existing employers, and between managers (who arrange placements) and supervisors (who work with the learner).

APPROACHING NEW CONTACTS

Bear the following points in mind.

- Research into the individual company will help you to pitch your approach. For example, going in with all guns blazing about the business benefits of training would not be appropriate for a company that had just achieved Investors in People status. On the other hand, you could use that information to your benefit, both to acknowledge their achievement and to show that you have done your homework.

- You may be able to build on the success of your initial contact about key skills – you should certainly canvass opinion as early as possible about what means for providing further information would be most helpful.

- Cold calling (e.g. by phone) does not always produce results. Many people resent cold calls, others just won’t make your message a priority and so will dismiss you without really giving the matter any thought. That is a waste of a potentially valuable contact.

- A brief letter (perhaps with an introductory leaflet) can make a big difference in preparing the ground a few days prior to a call. However, don’t assume that it will have been read – a very high percentage of mail goes straight into the ‘circular filing cabinet on the floor’.

- If you work in one local area, you may be able to use existing networks (business groups, trade organisations, local Chambers of Commerce). Some of these may have their own magazine or newsletter. Try for a positive story featuring a company that is succeeding with key skills.

As a general guide, don’t try to put across all you know about key skills in your opening approach. It will almost certainly put employers off because it seems quite complicated, and much of it is simply not necessary for them to know. Concentrate instead on the benefits of involvement with the key skills for them and their business, bearing in mind that the benefits – and their perceived value – will vary from one employer to another. For example, what will staff be able to do when they hold key skills at a given level – write a more detailed care plan, handle a customer complaint more effectively?
ESTABLISHED CONTACTS

Of course, your lines of communication are already open with existing providers of on-job training. However, their involvement with key skills training and assessment may be minimal. You will again need to think about your approach to secure increased awareness and commitment to developing key skills in the workplace.

Some of the mechanisms above might be appropriate, together with your monitoring or assessment visits, which can be used to get the essential messages over. Think about what supporting materials you need to reinforce the messages you are giving, but be careful not to overload busy employers and supervisors with data.

Other activities that have proved useful include your own employer newsletter, employer meetings and presentations, hosting an employer group and awards ceremonies.

DISTINGUISH BETWEEN MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORS

There has long been an issue about who needs to be involved in which aspects of on-job training. Clearly, in very small organisations the manager and supervisor are likely to be the same person. But in larger organisations they may be different – and this can cause problems.

• If supervisors are involved but without the support of top management, the resources and organisational commitment needed for effective on-job training are likely to be withheld, making worthwhile training, opportunities to experience a variety of jobs and release for off-job and specialist training less likely.

• On the other hand, top management support will be of limited value if the active support and commitment of workplace supervisors and colleagues are lacking. We have all heard about companies who make a public commitment to training at a national level, then find that local competition and profitability demands push those commitments aside. In some cases this may be a result of commitment in the boardroom and on the shopfloor but with a gap in the middle, where day-to-day decisions are made. An organisation will probably not get the full benefit of staff applying their key skills unless all people in the organisation are ‘skills aware’.

In essence, effective on-job training requires the commitment of managers and supervisors. If either is missing, the chances of problems increase dramatically. The effort needed to get everyone onside with key skills development really pays dividends. It’s just a question of how to achieve it. The first step is to work out strategies for making initial approaches to both managers and supervisors.
INFORMING MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORS ABOUT KEY SKILLS

You need to plan what information you will give to both managers and supervisors. This will involve deciding what they need to know to play their role to the full.

WHAT MANAGERS NEED AND WANT TO KNOW

Managers need sufficient information to make an informed decision about their involvement in key skills training in the workplace.

Once they have made their decision, they need to feel confident that they have the necessary awareness of key skills implementation to manage the process to yield benefits for all involved – learners, supervisory staff and the company as a whole.

- They may need to know the **key skill areas and about the different levels** – including the fact that there are key skills units that are appropriate to their own role.

  However, be very cautious about pushing the idea of managers (or supervisors) taking a key skill qualification themselves: some may feel sufficiently intimidated to withdraw completely. While it can be a great boost to learner morale, let them suggest the idea for themselves. Rather, emphasise the opportunity for progression within the company. This will help present the image that key skills are not for stupid people and not only needed to get a job in the first place.

- Alongside this, managers may need help to recognise the **relevance of key skills** and the benefits of their delivery and assessment integrated with job-specific skills of the NVQ. Here you should consider the industry context of the employer. Use examples that are relevant and credible. If you refer to job roles and processes, make sure that they are current.

- You could offer to do a **sample key skills mapping** for one or two job roles.

- Managers should be aware that the key skills required by an Apprenticeship framework will probably not match the requirements of the job that the learner is being trained in. The key skills may demand **wider learning and application** than is readily achieved in one (rather limited) job role. So managers may need to **create opportunities** for learners to extend their experience through other job roles and/or to extend the role to take in more of the key skills. Conversely, limiting key skills training to the minimum framework requirements will very often be bad news for both learner and employer.
They will need to know that the **workplace supervisor has a vital role** in ensuring the success of key skills in the workplace. The manager needs to know how the supervisor can be supported and enabled to fulfil the role so that the benefits of key skills development for effective working and learner achievement are delivered.

**WHAT SUPERVISORS NEED AND WANT TO KNOW**

Supervisors will be under a variety of pressures. They will be expected to ensure that their team gets the job done, to standard and on time. Some supervisors might initially see key skills as an extra burden rather than as a benefit to them – particularly where the employer has made an ‘executive decision’ to engage with key skills without consulting the staff who will be responsible for their implementation or who will be most directly affected in the workplace. (It is worth raising this point with enthusiastic employers who rush into signing up before discussing the implications with colleagues.)

The case for workplace supervisor involvement in key skills should be put in such a way that the necessary investment of time and effort is seen as worthwhile in relation to the benefits available. Give some thought to the benefits that might be available to a supervisor. These might include:

- better teamwork
- more autonomous staff – more able to sort out problems and learn about things for themselves
- help with staff cover as staff can transfer their skills into other duties
- better communication in the workplace – and with customers

– all of which add up to a happier and more effective workplace and less stress for the supervisor.

**CLARIFYING ROLES**

Once you have done the preparatory work to gain commitment, ensure awareness and provide necessary information, there is just one important aspect left: all those involved must be aware of their roles. This is not the time to understate what is required. Be as clear and specific as possible. Make clear what aspects of their roles are absolutely necessary and which aspects would be beneficial if time and circumstances permit. You will have given them all the information they need to make it work, so there are no nasty surprises left.

The majority of employers should be prepared to make the effort to ensure that the arrangement works as well as possible. By this stage it should be apparent to employers that it is in their interest to help it to do so.
LINES OF INTERACTION

USING THE LINES OF INTERACTION TOOL

You can use the Lines of interaction tool overleaf to help you clarify roles and the interactions that have to occur to enable the placement to be effective for both the learner and the employer.

This tool splits the learner’s journey into four main stages:

- recruitment
- induction, initial assessment (IA) and individual learning plans (ILPs)
- teaching and learning
- assessment and portfolios.

For each stage, think about the critical interactions between the main partners: the learner, the provider and the employer.

For each significant interaction, draw a line on the graphic in the left-hand column to show who it is between and make notes to describe each interaction.

Use the right-hand column to describe the necessary outcomes of the interaction.

EXAMPLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Main interactions between learner, employer and provider</th>
<th>Necessary outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment</td>
<td>Face-to-face initial contact with YP at careers day, job-fair, etc.</td>
<td>Awareness of whole Apprenticeship framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes initial contact by phone from employer with employed recruit</td>
<td>Awareness of what the whole deal consists of, including key skills and their benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Face-to-face interview with YP</td>
<td>Awareness of training for career not just a job - therefore key skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### LINES OF INTERACTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Main interactions between learner, employer and provider</th>
<th>Necessary outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Induction, IA and ILPs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching and learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment and portfolios</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To help you explore where you and employers can work together, the following table offers some suggestions at each stage of the learner’s journey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Employers</th>
<th>Providers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment</td>
<td>Identify vacancy</td>
<td>Help employer create job description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Liaise with provider – share business needs</td>
<td>Advertise vacancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview candidates</td>
<td>Place a link on own website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Confirm suitability of programme and candidate</td>
<td>Refer to employers as ‘partners’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide employment</td>
<td>Provide a clear explanation of what you can offer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Take responsibility to nurture learner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification of need</td>
<td>Complete initial assessment – suitability for the post</td>
<td>Use range of initial assessment methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inform provider where the need for specific support has been identified</td>
<td>Plan how, where and when teaching, learning and assessment will take place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involve parents</td>
<td>Plan how you will keep an up-to-date record of learner’s progress and development needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work in partnership with providers</td>
<td>Consider which staff can contribute to supporting the learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discuss key skills required for the job</td>
<td>Discuss key skills required for the job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual learning plan (ILP)</td>
<td>Link individual learning plan to staff development record and appraisal system</td>
<td>Explain the requirements of paperwork required to attract public funds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Release learners at times flexible to business needs</td>
<td>Consider history of training in sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Check that ILP is an accurate record of needs and that solutions meet the requirements of the company</td>
<td>Consider size and capacity of employer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Induction</td>
<td>Carry out company induction</td>
<td>Build on employers’ own induction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Share with provider what is in the company induction</td>
<td>Deliver programme induction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Offer to include employer staff who will support learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage</td>
<td>Employers</td>
<td>Providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching and learning</td>
<td>Liaise with assessor&lt;br&gt;Active support of learner with learning and assessment opportunities&lt;br&gt;Influence assessment schedule through actual work activities (link NVQ and key skills evidence)&lt;br&gt;Open up training to other employees&lt;br&gt;Allow release for training, e.g. block or day release</td>
<td>Complement employer specialist training&lt;br&gt;Develop and support workplace mentors&lt;br&gt;Contextualise learners’ training to business needs&lt;br&gt;Tailor training to sector/industry requirements&lt;br&gt;Offer flexibility of delivery, e.g. time, location and duration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Ask questions of provider to develop company knowledge of NVQ and learner development – so that company can actively support&lt;br&gt;Contribute to developments&lt;br&gt;Host on-site development sessions&lt;br&gt;Release for off-site assessment</td>
<td>Consider how employer can check progression&lt;br&gt;Promote on-site assessment&lt;br&gt;Minimise disruption to the operation of the business&lt;br&gt;Support employer staff to provide witness testimony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review</td>
<td>Feed into progress review&lt;br&gt;12-weekly review – reflect on evidence gathered by tutor&lt;br&gt;Review if programme continues to hit the mark for the company&lt;br&gt;Review performance and pay at work</td>
<td>Arrange face-to-face review with learner and supervisor&lt;br&gt;Identify where else the provider can support the employer&lt;br&gt;Be aware of work patterns for employer, e.g. very busy December to January for catering sector&lt;br&gt;Agree with employer any required changes to individual learning plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certification</td>
<td>Consider incentive for learners to complete&lt;br&gt;Encourage progression within company&lt;br&gt;Publicise and celebrate success within and outside company&lt;br&gt;Agree success targets with provider</td>
<td>Celebrate achievement&lt;br&gt;Arrange for photographs and publicity&lt;br&gt;Discuss recruitment with employer – has learner advanced in company?&lt;br&gt;Reflect on how things went – agree plan with employer to build on strengths and address weaknesses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SPEAKING THE RIGHT LANGUAGE

USING THE SPEAKING THE RIGHT LANGUAGE TOOL

Employers and providers often use very different words and phrases when discussing key skills and Skills for Life delivery. This resource will help you to explore these words and phrases and to consider how you can make sure that your language is as appropriate as possible.

The Speaking the right language tool has four sets of boxes that you can complete. You may like to fill them in with one or more colleagues who also work with employers.

WHAT EMPLOYERS SAY

The first example contains three statements that an employer might make. You need to think through what you feel the employer might be saying in each statement and enter it in the space provided.

Here are three similar statements with sample interpretations. There could, of course, be other interpretations of what the employer means in each case.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employer says…</th>
<th>Provider hears…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What will I get out of this?</td>
<td>Have I made the benefits clear?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why should I pay for this?</td>
<td>What will it cost to deliver?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am not releasing staff for this</td>
<td>We need to discuss delivery options</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WHAT EMPLOYERS HEAR

The second example contains three statements that you as a provider might make. You need to consider what the employer might hear each time.

You can then use Examples 3 and 4 to include:

• statements you often hear from employers
• statements you often make to employers.

Again, complete the boxes for both the statements and how they might be interpreted by the other person. Then discuss what implications this has for how you speak to employers. Are there other ways you could say things that might help employers to see the benefits of training their staff in skills?
## SPEAKING THE RIGHT LANGUAGE

### EXAMPLE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employer says...</th>
<th>Provider hears...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why should I use you?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We already do training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I need staff better at customer service</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### EXAMPLE 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provider says...</th>
<th>Employer hears...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key skills are transferable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s free</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key skills are really good</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### EXAMPLE 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employer says...</th>
<th>Provider hears...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### EXAMPLE 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provider says...</th>
<th>Employer hears...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
USING THE EMPLOYER’S ROLE BOOKLET

The booklet *Key skills and Apprenticeships – the employer’s role* may be useful when explaining key skills to employers. It is written so that you can give copies out to an employer and covers:

- **What are key skills?** – highlights the vital role that employers need to play
- **The six key skills** – introduces the qualifications, their levels and their role in Apprenticeships
- **Your role** – suggests ways in which the employer can work with the provider and support the learner
- **How key skills are assessed** – introduces the portfolio and the tests
- **Key skills at work** – gives examples from different sectors of where the key skills are useful.

There are also two checklists at the end.

You may find it useful to talk through the guide, section by section, with an employer – and possibly complete the checklists together.

You are welcome to adapt the booklet in any way for your own use – for example, you could take out specific sections that you find useful.
THE SIMPLE GUIDE

The *Simple guide to key skills* is a booklet written primarily for learners, but it is written in such a way that it can also be a useful tool for employers. It provides more detailed information about the individual key skills and where these are useful at work.

So you could use it:

- when you meet an employer, if you wish to explain the individual key skills in greater detail
- with a learner and supervisor together, to introduce the key skills and to start a discussion of learning opportunities.

To order copies of the *Simple guide to key skills* and further copies of *Key skills and Apprenticeships – the employer’s role* telephone the Learning for Work publications order line on 0117 971 9583.
WAY TO WORK, TWICKENHAM

‘Warm but demanding’ is the way Mary Castledine, Operations Manager at Way to Work, describes their approach to employer liaison. This means a friendly approach but one that makes clear what is expected of employers. Way to Work has a highly structured approach to recruiting, working with and keeping employers on their Apprenticeship programme. There is an agreed procedure followed by the team, with great attention to detail. The key ingredient is regular personal and face-to-face contact with swift follow-up at all key stages.

The process at Way to Work is based on the following 12 key stages.

1 FIND EMPLOYERS

Employers are found through:

- repeat business
- word of mouth
- referrals
- networking
- warm leads.

‘I have even recruited an employer in a pub, and sometimes we find companies through learners who have gone on to other jobs and bring their new organisation to us,’ says Mary.

All of the above methods rely on personal contact. It is clear from Way to Work’s experience that other forms of promotion are not effective, i.e. advertising, mail-shots, business breakfasts, telesales. The reason for lack of employer interest in these more hands-off approaches is that they attempt to attract employers who are not looking to recruit a young person in the first place. Employers must have a vacancy for successful recruitment to take place.
2 SCREEN EMPLOYERS BY TELEPHONE PRIOR TO AN INITIAL VISIT

This gives the opportunity to identify that the employers are:

- serious about taking an apprentice
- supportive
- in an appropriate location and premises
- a business of a minimum size to offer training and learning opportunities
- in a sector that matches with a qualification
- prepared to pay a contribution.

This last point is paramount and Way to Work has a policy of informing employers that the average cost for a learner per year is in the region of £10,000. This covers a whole package of recruitment, training and additional support. Employers can then deselect themselves at this point with no further time or resources being taken up on the recruitment process. Employers who are interested receive an information pack prior to a visit. Employer profiling commences at this stage to ensure that the follow-up visit is pitched appropriately and provides the company with the relevant information and guidance. For example:

‘Some employers need to know how to conduct an interview and even need help drafting some open questions. If I know the company will need this support, I go along well prepared. Other organisations might be insulted if you told them how to conduct an interview. You have to use your soft skills to make sure you get this right.’

3 BRIEF EMPLOYERS BY A FACE-TO-FACE VISIT

This involves:

- a 60- to 90-minute meeting
- drafting a job description
- drafting a person specification
- carrying out a health and safety check
- explaining the employer’s role
- briefing employers on conducting interviews where guidance is required
- outlining the induction process
- completing the employer contract – a plain English, one-sided document
- meeting the supervisor as well as the manager.
Way to Work, Twickenham (continued)

4 PRODUCE FINAL COPY JOB DESCRIPTION AND PERSON SPECIFICATION

To maintain the employer’s commitment Mary and her team turn around the paperwork for the company on the day of their visit. By the end of the day the employer will have a copy of the job description and person specification emailed or faxed to them, ready for signature and to commence the recruitment process.

5 VACANCY IS POSTED

The secret of Way to Work’s success is that young people are interviewed and recruited directly to jobs that are guaranteed. This minimises unrealistic expectations and begins to train apprentices for the world of work. Vacancies are posted at:

• the Way to Work website
• Connexions offices.

6 YOUNG PEOPLE ARE SCREENED FOR THE VACANCY

Part of the package for employers is that Way to Work pre-selects young people prior to sending them on for interview. Prospective apprentices are screened by telephone to find out:

• where they saw the vacancy
• their eligibility for apprenticeship
• their prior experience and qualifications
• their genuine interest in the job role.

‘If they are applying for an accounts vacancy but it emerges they hated maths at school, we would advise them to have a rethink,’ comments Mary.

7 FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEW WITH YOUNG PEOPLE AT WAY TO WORK

Between six and ten young people will be interviewed for a vacancy and then shortlisted down to four to six for the employer to see.

8 EMPLOYER INTERVIEWS YOUNG PEOPLE

The employer will select two potential apprentices from the shortlist of applicants and provides feedback on all the young people’s performance. All applicants receive sensitive face-to-face feedback from Way to Work to improve their skills for next time.
9 HALF-DAY WORK TRIAL FOR TWO SHORTLISTED APPLICANTS

Two shortlisted applicants will return to the employer for a half-day work trial where they and the employer ‘discover things about each other’ to help make the decision of who is right for the job. Both are given the same tasks to do to assist comparison. The benefits of this additional activity are that:

- the employer can observe the applicant at work
- the applicant can try out the workplace – some may never have been in an office environment and might find that it is not for them.

Mary and her colleagues get employer feedback on the trial – usually on the same day. ‘Never let the trail go cold with an employer – you must be proactive.’

10 YOUNG PERSON STARTS AT WORK

- An induction at Way to Work has already taken place.
- They undergo a detailed induction at work.
- The employer is required to provide the applicant with a letter outlining the job offer and arrangements for leave, sick leave, pay, etc.

11 CONTACT IS MAINTAINED

- Way to Work telephones the young person and the employer on the first day and each subsequent week prior to the 3-week follow-up visit.
- Following the 3-week visit, contact is maintained through getting feedback from employers via a questionnaire every 3 months and the opportunity for visits by Mary to the workplace if difficulties with the apprentices arise – known as ‘Wake up and smell the coffee’ visits.

12 3-WEEK VISIT

- LSC forms are signed – this is the point at which Way to Work commences claiming for the young person.
- Training programme details are reiterated and the supervisor’s commitment is checked and secured.
EARLY STAGES

Getting employer commitment in the early stages is essential, and that commitment must be based on an open and honest description of:

- the benefits to the employer of developing key skills and Skills for Life
- what the employer is required to do and provide
- what you, as the training provider, will be bringing to the table.

This section contains guidance on:

- Involving employers in the early stages
- Involving employers in planning learning
- Setting SMART targets
- Using the logbook

and the following resources:

- ILP fitness check
- Logbook
- Case study: Peterborough College of Adult Education
INVOLVING EMPLOYERS IN THE EARLY STAGES

This quote from the ALI website makes depressing reading when you consider how every point contributes to the learners’ and employers’ almost inevitable disinterest in the programme.

Employers are not involved in the initial assessment processes. No agreement is made with employers which stipulates their contribution to the training and support of learners. Learners do not have detailed learning plans with agreed targets. Neither learners nor their employers have a clear understanding of the Apprenticeship frameworks or how long they should take to complete.

Source: ALI website

By contrast, what a great regime it would be if each of the negatives were turned into a positive feature of employer engagement in the early stages.

Employers are involved in the initial assessment processes. Agreement is made with employers which stipulates their contribution to the training and support of learners. Learners have detailed learning plans with agreed targets. Learners and their employers both have a clear understanding of the Apprenticeship frameworks and how long they should take to complete.

You can see a picture of committed involvement resulting in purposeful workplace activity and rapid achievement of all aspects of the programme, including the key skills and Skills for Life. Indeed, it is difficult to understand how work-based programmes can work without the active commitment of employers and workplace supervisors.

Early positive experiences of involvement in induction, initial assessment and planning learning will help show employers that the training is really worth while and that their involvement in it is both essential and beneficial to them.

Gaining employer commitment to any component (not just key skills and Skills for Life) later in the programme will be a much harder sell. Modelling good practice and showing what is expected of employers and supervisors during the first few weeks is really helpful in establishing good habits that will last the length of the programme. Learner commitment is difficult, exhausting and time-consuming to retrieve when it has slipped. So is employer engagement. Do all you can to get things off to a positive, engaged start and to keep them that way.
INDUCTION

The credibility of your programmes in the eyes of learners can be built from the start by involving employers in the induction process. For example, you might be able to:

• get employers in to talk with learners about their industry and the sorts of roles people carry out. Ideally, employers may also be able to describe the relevance of key skills/Skills for Life to work roles in their workplace

• arrange an industry visit, so that learners can see for themselves, very early on, that your aim is to prepare them for real work in real workplaces

• if learners are employed from the start of their programme, discuss with the employer ways of coordinating your induction process to complement workplace requirements.

INITIAL ASSESSMENT

There are several ways in which you can involve employers in initial assessment.

• During an industry visit or the early part of on-job training, ask learners to carry out some relatively simple research into the jobs that people do, the experience that they have and the work processes involved. This would provide lots of useful information about how individuals prepared for the visit, conducted it, recorded data and fed back what they had found out. It would help form a picture of each learner’s strengths, weaknesses, starting points and learning needs.

• Invite feedback from supervisors about how their learners are doing in the early stages. Because of their day-to-day involvement, they may be able to spot aspects of key skills or Skills for Life where a learner needs help or is doing well.

• Share the results of initial assessment with employers. This can help to emphasise the support that you will be giving to them and to learners.
INvolving Employers in Planning Learning

In most situations, the learner spends the vast majority of his or her time in the workplace, working closely with a supervisor, and it is in that situation that most learning will take place.

Even if the learner goes to the training facility periodically, that will be largely for information input. The learning process requires teaching plus opportunities to reflect on learning, try things out, practise and, eventually, deploy skills and understanding before they can be described as competent. The natural location for all but the first step will be the workplace. Learning will require sequencing and each step needs to be planned – in collaboration with the workplace.

A ‘one size fits all’ approach to planning work-based learning is very hit and miss. Expecting the employer to rearrange his or her business around your teaching plan is unrealistic. On the other hand, once the programme for a learner has been agreed between learner, employer and training provider, the expectation must be that it will be followed by all parties. This only becomes a realistic expectation when all are involved in building the plan.

An individual learning plan (ILP) is a crucial part of your partnership with both the learner and the employer. Understandably, it should be:

- **individual** to the specific learner, reflecting his or her ambitions, existing skills and training needs
- **focused on learning**, application and assessment (in that order) – an assessment plan may be useful later but the two should not be confused
- a viable **plan** which takes into account available opportunities for learning, practice and deployment.

Of course, it may be necessary to negotiate adjustments to the plan during a progress review. This can realistically only be done if all the main parties are present and engaged in the review.
**HINTS AND TIPS**

- Make sure that the individual learning plan is understandable for both the learner and their employer.

- Avoid using standard learning plan content for all learners on a programme – it won’t be individual.

- Plan in more detail for the short term and in outline for the longer term.

- Consider how on- and off-job training can be coordinated, even in small ways.

- If the standard individual learning plan document is not suitable for planning the learner’s programme, use supplementary documents and attach them to the main plan.

- Use the learning plan as a working document by checking progress against it and amending it when necessary.

- Consider using a time line with your individual learning plan – so that both the learner and the employer can clearly see what part of learning, application and assessment is planned to happen when.

Individual learning plans feature in six of the seven key measures in the ALI’s Common Inspection Framework:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KQ1</th>
<th>How well do learners achieve?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KQ2</td>
<td>How effective are teaching, training and learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KQ3</td>
<td>How well do programmes and activities meet the needs and interests of learners?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KQ4</td>
<td>How well are learners guided and supported?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KQ5</td>
<td>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal opportunities</td>
<td>How well is equality of opportunity promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve their potential?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality improvement</td>
<td>How effectively is performance monitored and improved through quality assurance and self-assessment?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SETTING SMART TARGETS

SMART targets identify what’s going to happen, who’s going to do it, when it’s going to be done by, and how achievement will be measured. This is easy to say but much harder to do in practice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific</th>
<th>Measurable</th>
<th>Achievable</th>
<th>Relevant</th>
<th>Time-related</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>they say exactly what you mean</td>
<td>you can prove that you’ve reached them</td>
<td>you can reach them</td>
<td>they are appropriate to your work</td>
<td>they have deadlines</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some questions for you to consider when looking at targets:

- Are your targets appropriate?
- Are they really used?
- Who sets your targets?
- Who really owns the targets?
- Are they challenging?
- Are your targets linked to rewards? If so, are they sufficiently specific and measurable?
- Do you rigidly adhere to targets or do you adapt to individual changes and developments?

Remember: targets require constant monitoring, and revising if necessary, to remain valid and meaningful.
USING THE ILP FITNESS CHECK

The following ILP fitness check (based on ALI: Building better practice) can be used to evaluate your current ILP structure and to judge the quality of the information included in completed plans. It highlights several points.

• The plan should be based on the learner’s initial assessment and it should map the route from that starting point to the achievement of the full programme.

• The individual learning plan should incorporate both on-the-job training and off-the-job training and show how the two are coordinated.

• A plan for a programme of learning which is to last perhaps for 3 years cannot be very detailed, but there should be sufficient detail for the learner, the employer and your staff to see the major steps towards completing the programme. In particular, it should explain how any additional support needs, identified through initial assessment, are to be provided for.

• Funding bodies sometimes specify a format of individual learning plan which is primarily intended as a financial audit document and is not entirely suitable for planning the programme. An effective learning plan is still required for the benefit of the learner.

• The learner should be involved in creating the learning plan and should understand the reason for its contents. It is then more likely to become a working document to which the apprentice and the employer regularly refer. The plan should be routinely reviewed and amended if necessary. As the programme progresses, it may be useful to add more detail to the plan.

• The individual learning plan should build on the strengths of the learner and not just highlight weaknesses.
ILP FITNESS CHECK

QUICK CHECK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does each learner have an individual learning plan?</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is each plan different, reflecting each learner’s initial assessment and different workplace?</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is on-the-job training planned as well as off-the-job training?</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have learners been involved in writing their individual learning plans?</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the learning plan used as a working document?</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MORE DETAILED ANALYSIS

1. At what point do you first start your ILP with learners?
   - Does this work?
   - What could be improved?

2. In your overall programme, how is individual support planned?
   - How well is this recorded on the ILP?
   - Is it helping the learner?
   - How do you know?
3 What do you do in your programme to ensure that learners access the various parts (including support)?

How is this monitored and recorded?

What happens if learners do not attend?

4 How well does your ILP reflect all parts of the learner’s programme?

5 Who on your staff is involved in programme planning?

What quality improvements do they make to the planning process and how?

6 Which of your stakeholders are involved in programme planning?

What quality improvements do they make to the planning process and how?
(Think of learners, employers, parents, other partners)

7 How does information from individual learning plans inform overall planning – including staffing implications and resourcing?

8 Who checks the quality of your individual learning plans?

What is this process telling you?

Are there any gaps?

9 Do you have a systematic way of assessing your overall learning programme to deal with all of these issues? (For example, is there an annual staff away day or a regular training/development session specifically dedicated to this?)

10 How well are your staff and stakeholders involved in the process?

How does this translate into your business planning and self-assessment processes?
USING THE LOGBOOK

The purpose of the Logbook is to feed the learner’s early experiences at work into the initial assessment process.

You need to identify four tasks that your specific learner will do during the first 2 weeks at work that involve key skills.

During induction (or your first meeting with the learner) you should spend a few minutes going through the logbook together. Enter suitable task titles on the top of the four pages and briefly discuss what is involved. These should be relatively simple, focused tasks that can be achieved in a relatively short time. Be aware of where the learner will be working and their likely capabilities.

The on-job logbook is an ideal opportunity to plan the work with the learner and the workplace supervisor so that everyone knows what is happening and the learner can be supported.

After the learner does each task they complete the sections of that page of the logbook.

When you next meet up, go through the logbook together and discuss each task.

- The logbook will give you examples of the learner’s writing.
- The individual entries will help you to identify aspects of the key skills that the learner is more comfortable with, and those that they may need help with.

Of course, you should take great care that you don’t jump to conclusions. The logbook entries do, however, give valuable insights and are a great starting point for identifying the real skill gaps based on real, credible activities rather than invented scenarios.
Here are four example tasks for retail:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Key skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estimate and record stock needed to replenish a shelf</td>
<td>N1.1, N1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect stock from stockroom or store</td>
<td>N1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deal with a customer’s query about whether a repair can be done under warranty</td>
<td>C1.1, C1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ICT1.1, ICT1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make initial contact with customers</td>
<td>C1.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- A logbook entry may show that the learner is confident in using ICT to research information but has a weakness in presenting information in a simple document.
- A logbook entry which reveals muddled use of numbers against items of stock may indicate a writing problem as much as a number problem. You could focus in to discover which was the problem.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Name:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Task: Date:</td>
<td>Task: Date:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How long it took:</td>
<td>How long it took:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What I did (the stages of the task):</td>
<td>What I did (the stages of the task):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How it went:</td>
<td>How it went:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What I might do differently next time:</td>
<td>What I might do differently next time:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor:</td>
<td>Supervisor:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOGBOOK</td>
<td>LOGBOOK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Name:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Task:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Task:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>How long it took:</td>
<td>How long it took:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What I did (the stages of the task):</td>
<td>What I did (the stages of the task):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How it went:</td>
<td>How it went:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>What I might do differently next time:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor:</td>
<td>Supervisor:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Peterborough College of Adult Education has a large E2E provision of around 95 learners, many of whom progress to the college’s Apprenticeship programmes.

‘To achieve excellence’ and ‘to make best practice our normal practice’ are values that Beverley Peasgood, E2E coordinator, and her team are aiming to achieve on their programme, and this is especially noticeable in the early stages of a placement.

STARTING THE PLACEMENT

More than 85% of E2E learners attend work placements. Andy Byrne, Placement Officer, tries to get the best fit between employer and learner. With the learner’s permission, he discusses with the employer any issues which might impact on the placement – such as erratic attendance patterns – and plans how to overcome these. He believes that this open approach helps retain employers. Learners are well prepared for their interview, and Andy helps them put together a list of questions they might ask their employer. After the interview they discuss how things went, which gives the learner the opportunity to identify how they can do better next time.

PLANNING LEARNING AT WORK

PCAE has developed a work experience training and development plan, which learners take into work in their work placement portfolio. Activities at work are planned, monitored and reviewed under the three core strands of the E2E programme: vocational learning, personal and social skills development, and literacy and numeracy. When Beverley initially developed the plan, she grouped the strands together. They are now listed separately, giving the employer a better understanding of the aims of the programme, and ensuring that opportunities are identified at work to develop the learner in each strand.
From a sample of learners’ plans, targets in the literacy and numeracy section include:

• ‘Read a story to a group of children’
• ‘Measure correct quantities of dyes and bleaches for mixing’
• ‘Batch files, put in alphabetical order by surname and input data onto the computer’
• ‘Participate in stocktaking activity – accurately count and record stock levels’
• ‘Check product Use by/Best before dates and rotate stock as required’.

This planned approach to learning ensures that work placements are relevant and purposeful to the learner and employer. Situations are avoided where learners spend a lot of their time doing repetitive tasks such as making tea or photocopying. Most importantly, learners are able to practise and apply their skills in the workplace – with support from their mentor and key worker.

EMPLOYER FEEDBACK

In Spring 2006 PCAE produced their first employer newsletter. It thanked employers for completing a questionnaire and gave an analysis of the results. 100% of employers confirmed that PCAE’s training benefited their organisation, and 94% confirmed that learners receive appropriate support during their programme. It also invited employers to join a work-based learning steering group, which would meet quarterly and ‘last for a maximum of 90 minutes’. PCAE firmly believes in sharing information with employers, and in the newsletter they listed their key quality improvement targets.

PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT

PCAE has based its staff development programme on the competency framework for E2E staff (developed under the Success for All strategy). It is running six workshops, and one will focus on the competence to ‘establish and maintain relationships with employers’. Standards and procedures will be agreed for working with employers, which all staff will follow.

It has also accessed support from external agencies, including Learning for Work and the Standards Unit. Learning for Work helped the college get started with the wider key skills content of their E2E programme, and learners are now achieving the working with others unit. Beverley and her colleagues attend local network meetings, and are always ready to share information about their programme, including their strategies for establishing effective working relationships with employers.
Key skills learning, application and assessment are dependent on the identification of workplace activities that both supervisor and learner recognise as important parts of their work. Workplace supervisors are often the best people to identify such opportunities.

A meaningful task is one that is:

- complete
- relevant to the skill at the level the learner is aiming at
- designed to address a real business problem
- purposeful in terms of the learner's job and workplace.

This section contains guidance on:

- Making the most of learning opportunities at work
- Helping supervisors to develop coaching skills
- Using the Supporting learners card sort
- Involving employers in designing assignments
- How employers can help with the portfolio

and the following resources:

- Supporting learners card sort
- Supporting learners record sheet
- Case study: RWP Training, Carlisle
DEFINING MEANINGFUL TASKS

- Would a competent person recognise this as a meaningful part of their work?
- Is the activity something that competent people tend to do particularly well? Does it tend to mark out a good performer?
- Is the activity important? Does it contribute directly to the priorities of the workplace?
- Is this something that the learner will need to do regularly? Is it a priority that they become good at it?
- Will learning to do this activity well help the learner learn other, similar activities? Will they quickly be able to apply what they have learnt to new situations?
- Will learning to do this activity well help the learner to get better at learning other, different activities? For example, does the activity involve decision making? Does it call for thought and care?

Different activities may constitute a meaningful task, depending on the learner and the level of key skill they are aiming for. They range from a team meeting or a discussion with a customer through to a longer-term project such as reorganising a filing system.

There is, however, an important distinction between meaningful tasks for learning or application purposes and those for assessment.

- **Meaningful tasks for learning.** In principle, any relevant activity may help a learner to develop a key skill or skills.
- **Meaningful opportunities for application.** Relevant activities support the learner to take responsibility for applying the key skill or skills, until such point that they function without help to the appropriate skill level.
- **Meaningful tasks for assessment.** Identifying activities that can be used to generate evidence calls for more rigour. These activities must be to the standard required by the key skill unit.
HELPING SUPERVISORS TO DEVELOP COACHING SKILLS

Supervisors need good coaching skills if they are to support learners effectively.

WHAT DOES A GOOD COACH DO?

1. They observe the person taking part in an activity.
2. They analyse their performance and see which skills the person needs to improve and the potential they have to do so.
3. They give constructive feedback to the person on what they do well and where they could improve.
4. They explain and/or demonstrate better techniques.
5. They get the person to practise these techniques for themselves and correct any mistakes they may still be making.
6. They give them more opportunities to practise the new techniques, providing encouragement and support, until the person shows that they can consistently achieve the standard the coach is looking for.
7. They encourage them to use the new skill in other contexts in a creative way.

For example, RWP Training (see Case study) encourages employers to link learners with mentors who contribute to the completion of the learner’s ILP by helping to identify suitable optional units and by discussing resources needed to support achievement. Mentors also take part in the learner’s progress review alongside the RWP assessor, and agree and deliver appropriate training before the next review. And some mentors start to develop skills of training and assessment.

This approach is central to developing skills in the workplace. However, many workplace supervisors will need help if they are to apply the approach to key skills.
STEPS IN COACHING

Coaching involves a number of stages.

1 **Focusing on the problem.** The first thing the coach needs to do is identify an area the learner needs to work on, and explain that it is something that they are going to help them with. Where possible, they will discuss this with the learner, to make sure that they are involved from the outset.

2 **Observing or monitoring performance.** The coach then observes the learner applying this skill to a specific, meaningful task.

3 **Analysing performance.** The next stage is to analyse performance against the standard required. The key skill units can be very valuable here as they set appropriate standards.

4 **Feeding back.** The coach should then discuss the learner’s performance with them, asking them how they thought they did. The coach should be positive about the things they do well, but should also discuss the things they didn’t do well. It is vital to be open and honest with learners, while being supportive at the same time.

5 **Explaining and demonstrating better techniques.** Coach and learner then list the points they could work on. The coach can draw on his or her own experience to suggest other ways of doing the task.

6 **Giving further practice.** The coach then suggests further opportunities to practise, to help the learner progress towards the standard required by the unit.

7 **Taking the skill into other areas of work.** The coach should also encourage the learner to think about other areas of their work where they could use this skill. A good way of making sure that they could transfer this new skill effectively would be to question them about the knowledge and understanding in Part A of the unit.

This approach to coaching is something that most managers, supervisors or more experienced members of staff could take on.

Occasionally, employers and managers may suggest that overseeing learning isn’t part of their job. In fact, it is very much their job. Any sensible employer, manager or supervisor will ‘walk the job’. In other words, they will make a habit of seeing what their staff are doing, identifying when things are not going right and taking action to raise standards.

Key skill and NVQ standards can help make what is a common management task easier, because they offer a benchmark against which performance or learning can be measured.
**USING THE SUPPORTING LEARNERS CARD SORT**

You can use the following Supporting learners card sort with employers as a means of identifying ways in which they can increase their support of skills development.

The card sort contains:

- 3 heading cards: **We do this already**, **We could arrange this** and **There is no opportunity**
- 18 cards with statements about learning opportunities
- a Supporting learners record sheet.

There are also blank cards that you can adapt yourself.

**HOW TO USE THE CARD SORT**

- Begin by laying out the three heading cards **We do this already**, **We could arrange this** and **There is no opportunity** on the table.
- Shuffle all the other cards and put them in a pile face down.
- Turn over the top card and discuss whether the employer does this already, could arrange this or whether there is no opportunity. Put the card under the relevant heading card.
- Do the same with the other cards, so that you build up three columns or piles of cards. Discuss issues that arise along the way.
- Discuss ways forward – in particular, the **We could arrange this** cards. Are there ways in which you could help?
- Transfer the results to the record sheet, ticking the appropriate circle for each statement to reflect the employer’s position.

If you feel that the card sort process would be unsuitable for specific employers, you could just use the record sheet as a checklist, but make sure that you allow the time to take the process seriously.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WE DO THIS ALREADY</th>
<th>WE COULD ARRANGE THIS</th>
<th>THERE IS NO OPPORTUNITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting Learners</td>
<td>Supporting Learners</td>
<td>Supporting Learners</td>
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<td>Supporting Learners</td>
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<td>Supporting Learners</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supporting Learners</td>
<td>Supporting Learners</td>
<td>Supporting Learners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Attend progress reviews with trainer and learner
Arrange job swap for learner
Discuss learner's work with them
Put learner on an in-house course

Arrangement

Ask learner to do some market research
Take learners to meet a supplier
Tell learner about a new product or service
Ask learner to carry out a customer survey
Arrange a performance review for the learner

Discuss learner's work with them
Take learners to meet a supplier
Tell learner about a new product or service
Ask learner to carry out a customer survey
Arrange a performance review for the learner
Arrange for learner to go out with a service engineer/delivery driver/sales rep

Allow learner to practise and improve skills in a safe environment

Take learner to meet a customer

Show learner how to operate a new piece of equipment

Help learner to collect evidence for their key skills portfolio

Let learner work in another team/section/department

Arrange job shadowing

Give learner a new responsibility

Involve learner in defining a quality standard
## SUPPORTING LEARNERS RECORD SHEET

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>We do this already</th>
<th>We could arrange this</th>
<th>There is no opportunity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attend progress reviews with trainer and learner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrange job swap for learner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask learner to do some market research</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask learner to carry out a customer survey</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss learner’s work with them</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take learners to meet a supplier</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrange a performance review for the learner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Put learner on an in-house course</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell learner about a new product or service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrange for learner to go out with a service engineer/delivery driver/sales rep</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allow learner to practise and improve skills in a safe environment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take learner to meet a customer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show learner how to operate a new piece of equipment</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help learner to collect evidence for their key skills portfolio</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let learner work in another team/section/department</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrange job shadowing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give learner a new responsibility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involve learner in defining a quality standard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INvolving employers in designing assignments

Key skills are about application. Assignments can help learners to put knowledge and skills into action through structured opportunities that help them to extend and apply key skills to their work.

You can use assignments for learning and developing key skills, not just as a means of generating evidence. Learners need practice when applying their key skills as well as when acquiring them. You can use the assignments to help learners:

• learn aspects of a key skill
• practise and apply a key skill at work
• gather evidence for key skills in the course of their work.

An assignment is only appropriate when you are confident that a learner is ready to tackle it after learning and tutorial support.

Involving employers in assignment design can have two main benefits:

• the assignment is more likely to benefit the business – and this will increase its value and relevance to the learner
• the employer is more likely to be committed to supporting the assignment – and will themselves see the value.
USING THE ASSIGNMENTS CD

The interactive CD *Writing and using assignments* (included at the back of the toolkit folder) is designed to help you write your own key skills assignments and to adapt or amend existing ones. It takes you through a series of steps that enable you to write your own assignment on screen.

The CD contains different sections, each dealing with a different aspect of key skills assignment writing. They are:

- Using assignments
- Getting ideas
- Drafting assignments
- Adapting and improving assignments
- Piloting assignments.

You could use the CD with an employer to plan an assignment. It takes you through seven steps to writing your own assignment as follows:

- Think of a title
- Draft the introduction
- Write the stages
- Make any links clear
- Save and print
- Review your assignment
- Present your assignment.

It is possible that you’ll want to use assignments as a means of generating evidence for the key skills portfolio, but that is not really their primary intended purpose. Another resource included in this toolkit is designed for that – see the guidance on *How employers can help with the portfolio*.

Assignments are more a way of structuring and ensuring breadth of activities to practise and develop skills. They are often built onto a normal workplace activity, perhaps extending the activity to include some research, additional number skills, opportunities to compile a report, join a team for a specific project, etc.

Such opportunities are great for building confidence by deploying key skills in a variety of new ways in different situations. That is, after all, essentially what key skills are all about. Through such assignments, learners’ skills develop and their confidence to use their key skills grows.
HOW EMPLOYERS CAN HELP WITH THE PORTFOLIO

The workplace supervisor also has an important role to play in supporting the recording and assessment process. In some cases, indeed, a supervisor may be a qualified assessor.

There are several ways in which a supervisor can support recording and assessment. At a minimum level, the supervisor should talk about assessment with the learner and remind them to record relevant activities. A more committed supervisor would take a more proactive role, promoting and monitoring the learner’s progress and liaising with you about it.

USING THE PORTFOLIOS CD

*Building key skills portfolios* is included at the back of the toolkit folder on CD and you can copy it onto as many PCs or laptops as you like within your organisation.

You could use it with employers to identify good workplace opportunities for both learning and assessment. If you work through the steps on the CD with a learner and their supervisor, this can help both to:

- identify really meaningful workplace tasks for learning or assessment
- involve the supervisor fully in planning the task.

The CD will autorun when put into your PC running Windows 2000 or later. If it does not start, double-click on the file called buildpf.exe.

From the main menu, select where you want to go. You may find some of the material in the *Introducing portfolios* section useful before progressing to the *Managing...* sections. The entire package is designed for intuitive navigation, so you should find it easy to explore the content. The interactive analysis tools are in the *Work in progress* and *Assessment portfolio plan* sections.
The Managing work in progress section will be of particular value in preparing key skills profiles for specific workplace tasks. For each task you choose to profile, you will go through five linked steps. You’ll be able to follow your progress through the steps as each is highlighted at the top right of the screen. Each step prompts you through the process:

- **Step 1:** You give the task a title and briefly describe it.
- **Step 2:** You choose the key skills that really are essential to the task.
- **Step 3:** You then identify which key skill components are essential to the task.
- **Step 4:** You select items of knowledge that the learner must have to do the task competently.
- **Step 5:** Finally, you can make general notes about the task, perhaps when and where it will be learnt and practised, what outcomes from the task would be useful to include in the ‘work in progress’ file for subsequent review, etc.

It would be ideal if you could work through the process with the workplace supervisor or employer. Not only does this give your analysis great credibility, it also highlights to them that the key skills really are essential to occupational competence.

It would be possible to compile a booklet of key skill profiles for the common tasks in a specific workplace as a way of raising the profile of key skills amongst the staff team.

The Assessment portfolio plan section helps you select workplace activities that are likely to yield good key skills evidence. By being selective about the tasks to be evidenced, a slim collection of really convincing and coherent evidence can be put together to demonstrate coverage of a number of key skill components. The result is a slim portfolio of really strong evidence which is drawn from just a very few significant workplace activities – something that your learner will be proud to show. What’s more, because the activities are solidly grounded in real work tasks, you’ll be much better placed to involve the workplace supervisor in providing statements and possibly getting directly involved in assessment – all of which lightens your workload. A true win-win situation!
RWP TRAINING, CARLISLE

RWP Training operates in North and West Cumbria and has offices in Carlisle and Dissington. Training is offered in business administration, management, customer service, engineering, PMO (performing manufacturing operations), hairdressing, IT use and support. Commercially it also offers training in health and safety and is a Microsoft certified professional academy.

RWP encourages employers to link all learners with a mentor in the workplace who has received guidance and training. Workplaces with mentors for their learners are more likely to retain their learners. Where mentors are actively engaged in the learning process, over 85% of learners are retained, compared with under 70% for other work placements.

THE MENTOR’S ROLE

Mentors contribute to the completion of the learner’s ILP by helping identify suitable optional units and by discussing resources needed to support achievement.

Mentors take part in the learner’s progress review alongside the RWP assessor, and agree and deliver appropriate training before the next review. These formal reviews take place every 10–12 weeks. However, some mentors want to be involved more often. RWP assessors visit approximately every 3 weeks to assess learners; some mentors get involved in these visits too and start to develop skills in the planning and conduct of training and assessment.

Mentors attend presentation events organised by RWP, when learners who have completed their Apprenticeship receive their certificates. They also judge any in-house competitions organised by RWP, such as in hairdressing. These activities help to build a strong team ethos between RWP staff and workplace mentors and develop a common understanding of training goals.

DEVELOPING MENTORS

When the recruitment officer first visits a potential placement, they encourage the employer to appoint a mentor to support the learner through their training. The appointment is linked to a certification scheme for work placements which encourages employers to work to progressively higher standards of training.

Mentors attend RWP for a 3-hour induction to help them understand their roles and responsibilities in supporting learners on an Apprenticeship programme. The induction covers essential and desirable parts of a mentor’s role, including
framework requirements, learner induction, planning and delivery of on-the-job training, the review and assessment methods process and contractual requirements. Mentors receive a handbook explaining their role.

Following the induction workshop, mentors are encouraged to work towards nationally recognised mentoring, coaching and assessor awards.

RWP assessors speak to mentors when they next visit the workplace to conduct a learner progress review, and find out whether they want to work towards a relevant award. If they do, they attend further related knowledge sessions on coaching at RWP. Things done anyway, such as taking part in learner progress reviews, provide useful evidence towards the qualification. In addition, a separate, coaching assessor visits the mentor in the workplace to assess their competence, and the vocational assessor might provide witness testimony as further evidence. RWP provides some on-the-job training plans to help mentors make the most of learning opportunities.

Mentors who wish to become qualified as assessors follow a similar process. However, they also attend RWP standardisation and internal verification meetings, and start to conduct assessment as part of the subject team. When they qualify, their certificate and CV are kept on the team file by RWP, ready for external verifier visits.

RWP delivers the qualifications without charge to employer or mentor, and also pays for certification costs as part of their commitment to raising retention and achievement.

**RESULTS, PROBLEMS AND BENEFITS**

All workplaces have appointed a workplace mentor.

Where mentors are actively involved, employer commitment to training is greater, and more effective support for learners is provided. Retention has improved – over 85% of learners compared to 66% without. And learners with mentors make faster progress towards their qualification goals.

This has created some related challenges for RWP, in adapting training to cope with the quicker progress of some learners who have mentors at work! This is now being addressed by RWP, partly through encouraging mentors to deliver more on-the-job training, and partly through more flexible training off the job.

Occasionally, an employer appoints a person as mentor who is remote from the learner and who will not easily understand the challenges they face. Training raises understanding of the mentor’s role and encourages changes in the workplace to help the person filling the role to do so competently.

Approximately 16% of mentors have gone on to work towards coaching/mentoring qualifications, and 8% to assessor qualifications. These proportions are still growing, and RWP is finding that mentors are now starting to take the initiative in asking about doing the qualifications.
BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH EMPLOYERS

As you are increasingly able to tailor your products and services to employer needs, you can consider ways of building the relationship further to your mutual benefit.

Seeking and using feedback from employers is an extremely useful activity. It sends all the right messages about yours being a responsive and customer-focused enterprise. Get feedback and use it to improve what you are doing, identify new opportunities and build employer loyalty.

This section contains guidance on:

• Developing relationships with employers
• Making the most of the wider key skills

and the following resources:

• Identifying ways forward
• Increasing employer contributions
• Case study: RWP Training, Carlisle
DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS WITH EMPLOYERS

Here are some examples of ways in which you might develop your relationships with employers.

• Identify learning needs within the organisation that you may be able to support.

• Offer key skills training to other members of staff.

• Support supervisors to achieve learning and development units.

• Make learner reviews genuine three-way activities, by involving both the learner and the supervisor.

• Encourage employers to act as ‘key skills ambassadors’ in the business community, talking to other employers about the value of key skills – for example, could they find opportunities to mention key skills in local Chamber meetings?

• Involve them in presentations you do about key skills – for example, if you hold a breakfast seminar for employers, could you ask one of your star employers to describe what they do in supporting key skills?

• Describe their work in any leaflets or newsletters that you publish.

For example, RWP Training (see Case study) has developed a set of tiered standards (bronze, silver, gold) which describe progressively higher standards of commitment to and quality of training on the part of the work placement provider.
USING THE IDENTIFYING WAYS FORWARD TOOL

The Identifying ways forward tool is one way of planning how you will build your partnerships. It provides a grid for considering how you might make existing and new services available to existing and new employers.

For example:

• an existing service to an existing employer might be providing the communication key skill to members of an apprentice’s team

• a new service to an existing employer might entail offering wider key skills training to one of your employers

• an existing service to a new employer might be achieved by finding a new placement employer for apprentices

• a new service to a new employer might entail identifying and responding to a local need for training by creating a new product or service.

The grid is a very simple idea based on the Product–Market Growth Matrix developed by Igor Ansoff. Your products are the services that you offer and could develop, and your markets are the employers that you currently work with or could develop relationships with in the future.

You can use the grid by yourself or in a team session.

It is often helpful to break the opportunities down into manageable categories that make you think right through the topic.

Try to dig deep in each section – you’ll be surprised at what you can come up with. Think about all the services you might offer and how they might be attractive to employers. A little research into a relatively new initiative such as functional skills can often trigger ideas.

Simply brainstorm your ideas into the relevant boxes. Allow yourself to think really hard to get way beyond what you currently offer employers.
# Identifying Ways Forward

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Existing services to existing employers</th>
<th>New services to existing employers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Market penetration)</td>
<td>(Product development)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Existing services to new employers</th>
<th>New services to new employers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Market development)</td>
<td>(Diversification)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INCREASING EMPLOYER CONTRIBUTIONS

As you build your relationships with employers, you may wish to re-examine the contributions that they make to learning – and, indeed, the services you offer to them.

Begin by working out how much a learner’s programme costs you at present. You may have a formula for doing this or you may need to add up the various elements including recruitment, induction, training and assessment.

What the learner’s programme costs you

Then check how you fund the programme at present. What proportions come from government funding, employer contributions and other sources?

How you fund the learner’s programme

Then consider what additional contributions your employers might make. These could be financial, but they could include other contributions such as offering job-swap or rotation opportunities, facilities for training, etc.

What additional contributions your employers might make
One particularly effective way to encourage employers to contribute is to ask them what tasks they want the learner to be able to do. You can then work out how this links to the NVQ and key skills, and plan how and when learning will take place.

- If there is a good link to the qualifications, you can use this to show how relevant the training is to the workplace.
- Where the links are less clear, you can discuss with the employer the best way for the learning to take place, and any funding implications.

Here is one example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Relevant to</th>
<th>Learning the skills</th>
<th>Applying the skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing a care plan</td>
<td>NVQ Unit SC8: Contribute to the development and review of care programmes Communication: C2.2 and C2.3</td>
<td>Use workbook from Key skills in care by 23 October</td>
<td>On-job at meeting with client and supervisor by 16 November</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You can use a layout like this when you meet with employers. Adapt it to suit your own recording systems.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Relevant to</th>
<th>Learning the skills</th>
<th>Applying the skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

You can use this both to feed into your ILP and to structure a discussion with an employer about how they require the learning to be delivered and assessed (how, who, when, where questions). From this, you can get an accurate picture of delivery costs and have a transparent way of costing your provision and any employer contribution. You could also use this as a basis to discuss what else you might offer the employers. This might include the benefits that your training could offer other members of staff.
MAKING THE MOST OF THE WIDER KEY SKILLS

One set of products that you may be able to offer to new and existing employers is the wider key skills of:

- working with others
- improving own learning and performance
- problem solving.

These qualifications may not always be included within Apprenticeship frameworks. However, they can be useful in several ways.

- They are often seen as important for helping people progress and gain promotion.
- They are typically the skills that employers most want their staff to have.
- They provide an opportunity for meeting a learner’s entitlement for greater achievement and for developing and recognising their skills.
- They can help some learners – especially those working towards the Skills for Life – to get back into learning and to gain early achievement.
- Many NVQs contain units that are closely related to the wider key skills and it may therefore be relatively straightforward for the learner to gain an additional qualification.

So when introducing the wider key skills to employers, consider:

- talking through what the wider key skills involve
- relating them to business needs
- identifying staff who might benefit from the qualifications.
RWP TRAINING, CARLISLE

All providers with learners in employment or work placement have to ensure that their employers meet a certain standard for health and safety as a minimum. RWP Training has built on this by providing a framework of awards for work placements that gives employers an incentive to work towards excellence in standards of health and safety, learner support, promotion of equality and diversity, etc. It encourages better commitment to training in the place where learners spend most of their time.

FRAMEWORK OF AWARDS

In addition to approving work placements to have apprentices on site, RWP has developed a set of tiered standards (bronze, silver and gold) which describe progressively higher standards of commitment to and quality of training on the part of the work placement provider.

This framework encourages high standards for placements, and gives an incentive to work towards excellence. It encourages active engagement with training rather than mere passive acceptance of a learner’s presence on site, and stimulates faster and higher levels of achievement.

The placement award is made at three levels.

- **Bronze** – indicates a genuine commitment to training and to learning, including the appointment of a workplace mentor.

- **Silver** – indicates achievement of a high standard of involvement in training, including the achievement by the workplace mentor of nationally recognised standards in coaching or mentoring.

- **Gold** – indicates excellence in on-the-job training and assessment practice, including the achievement by the workplace mentor of nationally recognised standards in assessment.

WORKING TOWARDS AN AWARD

The recruitment officer visits the employer and agrees with them an initial action plan. Some things on this action plan may be required in order to become an approved placement for an apprentice. Actions may relate to health and safety, equality of opportunity or other items, and will help them to meet contractual requirements.
However, the plan will also be sufficient, if implemented fully, for the employer to achieve a bronze award. It is the employer’s choice whether they work towards the higher standards required for this award, but if they choose to do so, they receive support from RWP to help them. Once they achieve a bronze award, RWP will discuss the possibility of working towards silver or gold.

For example, some employers need support in understanding employment law, health and safety or equality of opportunity and how these relate to learners and their business. RWP takes extracts from nationally available publications and uses them to help placements meet legal obligations, but also to go beyond these, raising quality and supporting learners more effectively.

**GAINING AN AWARD**

The placement award is gained during the training process. This enables the commitment of each employer to be assessed in practice. At least three learner progress reviews must be attended by the workplace supervisor to gain the award, and paid time given for off-job training.

The criteria are monitored strictly. RWP itself has a learner working in its offices as their work placement. RWP has been working towards its own award, and has achieved a bronze, but not yet silver as their office supervisor, who acts as the mentor to their learner, has not yet achieved the coaching or assessor awards.

There is no financial incentive for employers to gain the awards, but they do receive a certificate to recognise their achievement. They get more involvement in the training, and also in quality assurance activities such as standardisation meetings.

**RESULTS AND BENEFITS**

To date, 15 employers have achieved the bronze award, three silver and one gold. A separate company, Learning Partners Ltd, has been established to award the achievement of the standards by placements. RWP wants all its employers to aspire to at least the bronze award.

Learners on a placement with at least a bronze award:

- make faster progress at developing practical skills than those who are not
- are more likely to complete their Apprenticeship frameworks, in less time, than learners who do not benefit from such a workplace
- show higher retention rates (at 86%) than with other employers
- are more likely to complete successfully, and so far, have done so within the expected duration of their programme.