THE VALUE OF THE WIDER KEY SKILLS IN WORK-BASED LEARNING
About the Key Skills Support Programme

This booklet has 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 and European Social Funding (ESF). 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.

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THE VALUE OF THE WIDER KEY SKILLS

The three wider key skills qualifications cover areas of performance that are highly valued by employers and can make a real difference to an individual’s work and life.

• Working with others focuses on teamwork and on planning, organising and carrying out work.

• Improving own learning and performance recognises the skills involved in being an effective learner.

• Problem solving covers the skills of recognising problems and identifying, evaluating and seeing through possible solutions.

All three key skills provide a framework for the process of continuous development and improvement through the plan–do–reflect–review approach.

Young people also need to develop their personal skills and a set of thinking and learning skills. These skills and attitudes are fundamental to improving young people’s employability as well as their learning.

Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work (DfES 2005)

A succession of employer surveys has underlined just how important these skills are. The most recent example is the CBI’s Employment Trends Survey for 2006, which showed that 52% of employers are dissatisfied with school leavers’ employability skills, notably their teamworking, problem solving and self-management skills – precisely the areas covered by the wider key skills qualifications. Incidentally, the figure of 52% compares with 45% for ‘use of English’ and 44% for number skills.

This booklet shows how the wider key skills can help young people to gain a job and move on to make progress in their career. It goes on to highlight the importance of teaching and learning linked to the wider key skills, giving examples from a number of work-based providers, and closes with a look ahead to the future role of these qualifications across the full range of work-based and work-related learning.
THE WIDER KEY SKILLS AND EMPLOYABILITY

A young person who is not employable has few opportunities in life and for further learning.

14–19 Education and Skills (DfES 2005)

Recent Government policy documents, notably the skills White Paper Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work but also the 14–19 Education and Skills White Paper (DfES 2005), have stressed the importance of equipping both adults and young people with employability skills – the skills they need both to get on the first rung of the employment ladder and to progress to reach their full potential. The wider key skills are central to employability.

Employability means what it says – it’s about having the skills needed to perform well at work. But within this there are important differences between:

- **threshold employability** – the skills needed to start a job and get on the first step of the ladder
- **sustainable employability** – the skills needed to perform really well in a job, remain in employment and progress through a career.

The following diagram illustrates this.
• Threshold occupational skills and knowledge plus a certain level of literacy and numeracy and personal attributes such as reliability and punctuality define the baseline for an occupation.

• Certain skills such as teamwork and communication span both threshold and sustainable employability. These skills are crucial for both entry into a job and progression.

• Sustainable employability involves real competence in occupational skills as well as career management and learning to learn. Workplace delivery of sustainable skills will be particularly important.

All of this demonstrates that all three of the wider key skills are crucial to sustainable employability:

• improving own learning and performance underpins learning to learn and is crucial to career development and lifelong learning

• working with others is highly relevant to communication and teamwork

• problem solving skills are central to increasing occupational competence.

### Developing personal attributes

Personal attributes such as positive attitudes are notoriously difficult to assess. However, development of a person’s wider key skills can help them to strengthen these attributes. For example:

- **working with others** emphasises the importance of planning and working to a schedule

- **improving own learning and performance** recognises the need to learn and work independently

- **problem solving** stresses the need to weigh up all the options, rather than jumping to easy conclusions.
THE WIDER KEY SKILLS, LEARNING AND TEACHING

These wider employability skills should be embedded within training and qualifications, as well as being taught separately as appropriate.

Leitch Review of Skills (HM Treasury 2006)

It is easy to think that the wider key skills do not need teaching – that learners acquire them ‘by osmosis’. In part, this may be a result of the fact that many of us have had to learn the skills ourselves without support. But these skills are too crucial to young people’s futures for them to be left to chance – and an increasing number of providers are finding innovative ways of supporting their learning.

Teaching working with others

Some clear patterns emerge from talking with providers at the leading edge of teaching working with others. Some of these teachers work with very disadvantaged young people.

- They make the skills explicit – for example, by discussing what a typical workday involves.
- They provide opportunities to practise the skills – often by asking learners to plan and carry through a task as a group.
- They encourage learners to reflect on how well they have done – and, if necessary, challenge them in a supportive manner.
A & R Training Services have many E2E learners who have under-achieved at school, may lack confidence and self-esteem and have attitude problems. Tutors find that developing learners’ skills of working with others helps to prepare them for the working environment.

Learners begin by talking about working with others informally, in a group with other learners and their tutor. They discuss things like not offending other people and taking account of other people’s opinions.

Learners choose from a number of tasks where they work together as a group to a deadline – such as producing a newsletter, joining a boxercise (keep fit) class or making a film. Tutors brief the whole group, then learners organise themselves and plan who will do what.

In later, individual debrief sessions learners examine evidence of their own performance within the group and can discuss potentially difficult aspects of their attitude or behaviour in a safe environment. For example, if a learner constantly interrupts, they may learn that they can’t always be the one talking.

**Working with others and communication**

There are important links between working with others and the communication key skill. Very often, when employers stress the value of communication skills, they are referring to teamwork and working with colleagues and clients.

A number of providers have found that working with others can be a useful starting point for learners who can begin to improve their communication skills in the process.
Teaching improving own learning and performance

Similarly, there are many ways of teaching IOLP. These include:

- helping learners to get better at reflecting – for example, by encouraging them to keep learning diaries or to reflect on their experience in a small group
- encouraging learners to think about how they learn and, in particular, the learning experiences they have found positive
- modelling IOLP during review sessions – planning learning, agreeing methods, setting deadlines and reviewing targets.

Rathbone is an educational charity that specialises in training young people. The centre has recently introduced the wider key skills into their post-16 programmes as a way of engaging learners and helping them to achieve a recognised qualification. IOLP is an integral part of one 4-week course and is an ideal way of helping learners focus on the day and/or week ahead:

Learners set SMART targets with their tutor at the beginning of each day. They also complete a weekly learning plan: this triggers a £25 bonus, so most learners fill it in!

Learners review their learning and performance at the end of the 4-week programme. Part of this involves them filling out a ‘Project process form’ where they review the creative process by describing: their brief, the tools they used and the people who helped, ideas and where they got them; how they tried them out; any risks they took; how they worked as a team – the part they played and the goals they achieved.
Teaching problem solving

Problem solving skills are often built into NVQ units. The problem solving key skill provides a valuable framework for helping learners to develop their skills. For example:

- using creative techniques such as ‘What if…?’ and mind maps to come up with alternative solutions to problems
- making the problem solving process explicit
- using review sessions to evaluate solutions to problems.

The Premier League has recently included problem solving in its programme for young footballers. Using the key skill has helped to make the nature of problem solving more explicit.

For example, after each match, the team reviews its performance. During the discussion they use a flip chart to note down the points that emerge and identify problems in the way the team and individual players have approached the game. They identify possible solutions and then, before the next match, review these and plan how to try them out.

In addition, they watch video analysis of each game and learners identify problems and refer to these in their logbooks.

Problem solving and application of number

There are plenty of opportunities to take advantage of the connections between problem solving and the application of number key skill. All of the key skills involve applying skills and techniques to practical situations. In application of number learners are required to see that a problem can be tackled by using numbers, carry out the relevant calculations and then interpret their findings in terms of what the numbers have to say about the original problem. This means that many situations call for both problem solving and number skills – and can be used to help learners make progress in both areas at the same time.
THE WIDER KEY SKILLS AS QUALIFICATIONS

The wider key skills are all accredited as qualifications in the National Qualifications Framework, so they provide valuable recognition for learners, and an impressive number of young people are taking advantage of the availability of these qualifications. The most recent figures for the numbers of learners completing wider key skills qualifications are for 2004–05. Over this period 105,000 wider key skills qualifications were awarded – of which 43% were in IOLP.

From the 2007 entry, the wider key skills also provide UCAS points for learners applying to university.

• One of the wider key skills at level 2 is worth 10 UCAS points.
• One of the wider key skills at level 3 is worth 20 UCAS points.
• At level 4, a key skill is worth 30 points.

In addition, the wider key skills can help learners to achieve other qualifications. This is particularly true of improving own learning and performance – the plan–learn–review process can help learners to achieve their NVQ. And for learners without qualifications – which may be the case with E2E programmes, for example – a wider key skill can offer valuable experience in completing a qualification as well as a real sense of achievement.
THE WIDER KEY SKILLS AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

There are a number of developments in the pipeline that will build on the success and popularity of the wider key skills qualifications.

One of the most important of these will be the introduction of new ‘specialised’ Diplomas, each of which will be available to 14–19 year-olds at levels 1, 2 and 3.

Timetable for the introduction of specialised Diplomas

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<th>From September 2008</th>
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<td>Construction and the built environment</td>
<td>Land-based and environmental studies</td>
<td>Public services</td>
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<td>Creative and media</td>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>Sport and leisure</td>
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<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Hair and beauty</td>
<td>Retail</td>
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<td>Society, health and development</td>
<td>Business administration and finance</td>
<td>Travel and tourism</td>
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<td>ICT</td>
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All of these Diplomas are being designed and developed to make sure that learners gain an excellent grounding in personal, learning and thinking skills. The three wider key skills are each highly relevant to this area and it seems likely that many Diploma students will gain wider key skills qualifications as they complete their programmes of study. And, of course, the wider key skills will continue to form part of many Apprenticeship frameworks and, at level 1, are likely to form part of the emerging Foundation Learning Tier.
Help, advice and information

For more information, check:

- the KSSP website at [www.keyskillssupport.net](http://www.keyskillssupport.net)
- the QCA website at [www.qca.org.uk](http://www.qca.org.uk)
- awarding body websites.