Good Practice in Assess-Train-Assess Approaches to Workforce Development

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Executive Summary

Background

- The term 'Assess-Train-Assess' (ATA) refers to the approach to development in which there is an initial assessment of any skills gap, followed by training provision to meet the needs identified in that initial assessment. Lastly, there is a follow-up assessment to determine the extent to which the training need has been met.

- Anecdotal reports from the Employer Training Pilots (ETP) had suggested that the ATA model was one of the features of the pilots that employers found attractive.

- The Department for Skills and Education (DfES) gained funding through the *Success for All*[1] budget for research to explore good practice in ATA approaches to workforce development, in order to assist other providers who wished to adopt this model of provision. In December 2003 the Institute for Employment Studies was commissioned to undertake the research.

- The objectives of the research were to:

    identify good practice in training to fill skill gaps

    examine the economics of ATA models compared to conventional approaches to delivery

    investigate whether the current FE funding model tends to incentivise or discourage colleges from adopting the ATA model

    consider the staff training needs that might arise from a shift to more work-based training of this kind, including the suitability of existing staff training and of the NVQ assessor and verifier units

    consider the resource and organisational implications for colleges and other providers of a shift towards ATA for learners who are not work-based

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[1] *Success for All* (2002), was aimed at encouraging good practice in FE, including encouraging the FE and training sector to engage more effectively with local businesses.

assemble and disseminate case studies of good practice

recommend ways of addressing FE staff training needs.

Method

- The method adopted consisted of four main stages:

    Background research and initial interviews with key stakeholders

    A broad trawl for examples of good practice

    Telephone interviews to gain information on practice from providers

    Case study interviews at selected organisations.

- Background research included interviews with representatives of the DfES, LSC, QCA, AoC, TUC and CBI. The purpose of the interviews was to form an understanding of the ATA model, current trends in delivery and the likely implications of current funding models for ATA.

- Intermediary organisations were contacted and asked to identify examples of organisations using the ATA approach. Intermediary organisations included LLSCs, the LSDA, SSDA, Business Link offices, RDAs, sector skill pilots, the CBI, the Basic Skills Agency, Association of Learning Providers, Association of Colleges, the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), the Further Education Research Association and the National Association for Staff Development.

- Organisations identified as offering ATA-based provision were phoned and questioned regarding the types of subject and qualification that were delivered; their involvement in skills audits and initial assessment of individuals; the nature of the training they provided; and the nature of any final assessment.

- Few providers adopted what might be considered an 'ideal' model of ATA, in which each learner would receive one-to-one assessment and training. The extent to which provision was individualised at each stage varied from provider to provider. This was in keeping with findings from the evaluation of the ETPs that suggested that overall, only around one in six ETP learners followed a strict ETP model.

- The information was used to select sites for case study visits with advice from the steering group. A total of 22 sites were identified and invited to participate in case studies and a total of 19 agreed to take part.

- At the case study sites, senior managers and assessors were interviewed and, where possible, learners. Where a site offered a range of awards or subjects, assessors were interviewed in different subject areas. The interviews focused on:

the way in which assessment is conducted

the types of learner who particularly benefit from ATA

the various practices adopted within the organisation for assessment *eg* on-line assessment

the training provided for assessors involved in ATA

how training is tailored and whether it is tailored for groups or individuals

provider estimates of costs incurred/funding obtained from ATA and conventional delivery approaches

the organisational and other benefits of adopting an ATA approach.

Findings

Initial assessment

- At the initial assessment phase, providers were involved in two partially-overlapping types of assessment. These were:

    the skills audit or training needs assessment

    assessment of the existing skills of individuals at the outset of the programme (the individual assessment).

The individual assessment may allow credit to be awarded where the person is found to be competent.

- Some employers identify the groups of workers who require training and the programme or qualification that is required within their appraisal, career development pathways and risk management procedures.

- The skills audit process therefore varied from employer-led to provider-led. A range of approaches were adopted, depending on the type of skill being assessed.

- A variety of approaches was used for the initial assessment of individuals. In addition to the usual types of assessment approach found in NVQs (questioning, observation, examples of products) assessors were using skills scans, (either paper- or computer-based) tests of reasoning and learning styles and skill tests. Initial screening was used to identify additional support for basic needs. Using computer software to assess basic skill needs was popular.

- Younger learners, particularly apprentices, had less opportunity to accredit vocational skills but they could often gain proxy exemptions for key skills within the apprenticeship frameworks.

- There were many reported benefits from the initial assessment:

Profiling basic or key skill needs means that tutors can identify any additional support the learner needs in order to cope with the vocational programme.

Through assessing them, tutors can make sure that learners are on the correct programme

For learners undertaking NVQs, it allows the tutor to check that the learner's current job will support the full range of assessment requirements needed for the NVQ.

Where training is to be delivered to a group, it helps the tutor ensure that the group has similar needs.

Basic skill assessments may also allow additional funds to be drawn down to supply additional support.

- In NVQs and apprenticeships, the initial assessment can provide the opportunity for existing skills to be formally recognised (through APL), or for exemptions to be gained for existing key skills (apprenticeships only). However, few providers reported many learners attaining units through APL. Some providers appeared unclear on the differences between APL, credit accumulation and transfer (CATS) and exemptions.

Training

- ATA providers would typically plan a training and assessment programme to meet the learner's needs. In terms of delivery, a very wide range of practice was encountered. Examples included:

    delivery of work-place communication skills in 'bite-sized' chunks of 10-15 minutes in a hospital.

    a CoVE helping to multi-skill manufacturing employees through a combination of on-site, off-the-job training followed by mentoring by a colleague in the workplace.

- Location typically depended on the type of programme or award; training towards NVQs most typically took place on the job. Amongst the good practice examples identified were:

    secondment of tutors to the employer's premises on a part-time basis.

    the development of learning centres at the employer's premises.

- Most providers involved with NVQs were working with employees one to one while they performed their jobs. Because of this, employees feel more confident and are better able to answer questions than they might be in another context.

Follow-up assessment

- Following training, ideally there should be some form of assessment to confirm that the identified skill needs have been met. This always took place if a qualification was awarded at the end of the training. In NVQs it is an integral part of the process and, effectively, an extension of the initial assessment. Very often, assessment was closely linked to delivery, especially where training was being delivered one to one, on the job.

- A range of good practice was encountered.

    In one manufacturing organisation, badges were used to indicate new skills that employees had gained. The badge showed the areas where the employee was qualified and allowed to work safely.

    One manufacturer was arranging for its workforce to become multi-skilled. The mentor and a company health and safety representative signed off a 'skills passport' that indicated the level of work the employee was qualified to undertake in the new skill areas. This passport then in turn contributed to the overall package of evidence towards the NVQ.

Funding

- A majority of the CoVEs interviewed during the research had used the funding available under the CoVE programme to buy equipment and employ the staff needed to deliver ATA.

- Many providers believed that it would be difficult to deliver an ATA approach under standard time-tabled provision.

- While some providers complained about the costs of diagnostic tools for basic skills, one provider that had introduced routine initial screening had been able to draw down additional funding on the basis of extra identified needs. These funds allowed the employment of a part-time, peripatetic, basic skill tutor.

Economics

- Some providers did feel that ATA was more expensive than conventional delivery schemes and they suggested ways in which it could be made more economical. The initial assessment was costly but this could mean less tutor time was involved at the delivery stage. Providers cited a range of ways by which they had sought to make ATA provision more cost-effective, including the use of:

    in-company assessors

    computers to deliver individualised assessment and training

specialist software such as e-portfolios.

- On the whole, NVQs can be delivered in the workplace and do not need as much classroom-based provision as other courses.

- Provider estimates of the minimum numbers of learners needed to make provision cost-effective ranged from 3 to 16 learners in a group, although some were visiting single employees. Where it is necessary to form a group for training, the initial assessment can be used to group individuals of the same ability level for group tutoring.

Resource and organisational issues

- Most of the providers involved with the ATA approach were in units that were not involved in timetabled provision. The main exceptions to this were those involved in apprenticeships, which involved a combination of timetabled teaching and work-based support and assessment.

- Providers servicing rural areas used locally-based tutors to reduce travel costs and make delivery more cost-effective. Another approach was to introduce a fully mobile group of tutors who came into the central offices occasionally to liaise with other staff.

- One provider used tape recorders and video cameras to capture evidence and reduce the time taken in recording assessment evidence.

- Capacity could also be increased by the use of other employees in the workplace, either as mentors/coaches, witnesses or assessors. However, where this takes place, it is important to have a formal agreement setting out the arrangements. Otherwise these supplementary activities may lose out to other workplace tasks.

Staff training and development needs

- Often, those involved in work-based learning would hold assessor or verifier awards. Such people often lacked experience or development in training or teaching. Where this was the case, providers believed there was an argument for development using either training or teaching awards as a framework.

- One suggestion was that a range of 'mini' awards be developed, focused on the guidance and support role, to recognise the particular skills involved.

- In addition, for those involved in delivering training on site, there was a view that particular skills were required in negotiating the workplace. One provider was introducing training to develop these additional skills.

- An emerging skill need was vocational tutors or assessors who were able to provide basic skills support.

Discussion

- *Does initial assessment matter?* The research showed that, while initial assessment is not always essential, where it is conducted it brings clearly identified benefits. It allows the provider to ensure the learner is undertaking the correct qualification for their current job role, identify any additional support needs the learner may have and in principle can cut out any redundancy of training. In the basic skills area, there were no exceptions. Initial assessment was viewed as essential.

- *How much is 'accreditation of prior learning' (APL) used?* Few providers reported much use of APL, primarily because they found historic evidence difficult to access. Some providers were also vague regarding the differences between APL, credit accumulation and exemptions.

- *How much does individualised training matter?* Learners who were coached one to one were enthusiastic about this approach. Because it avoids taking people away from the workplace, one-to-one training may be of particular value in small enterprises or where there is high pressure on staff.

- *How much does employer participation help?* Employer participation and support were seen as essential in facilitating employee development and assessment, and support for development by learners once back in the workplace.

- *The economics of ATA.* Providers gave estimates of the lowest size of group to which training could be delivered cost-effectively. This ranged from 3 to 16. Many referred to the use of technology in making training and assessment more economic, particularly in basic skills. Providers used part-time secondment of tutors and networks of locally-based tutors to reduce the cost of supporting a dispersed client group of learners.

- *Developing staff capability in ATA.* A series of areas in which staff development may be required was identified:

  Developing teaching/training skills was viewed as important for tutors who had come into the system when approval requirements focused predominantly on assessment and verification expertise.

  Development for the increasing range of support and guidance roles was viewed as valuable.

  Training to reduce the confusion between the use of APL, exemptions and unit credit transfer would be useful.

  Developing vocational tutors' abilities to support learners with basic skill needs is one approach that could increase provider capacity, trainer skills and extent of support for learners.

  Negotiating the workplace learning environment and co-ordinating training were also seen as major staff development issues.

Policy issues

Based on the research findings the following recommendations were made:

Initial assessment

- LSC/ALI to consider making the initial assessment an explicit component of provider contract approval and inspection.

- DfES/LSC should consider making the following available as a separate component of provider funding

    funding for an initial assessment phase for all work-based learners

    the necessary purchasing costs of basic skill tests.

- Awarding bodies to review and re-issue guidance on APL, credit transfer and unit exemptions and consider the need for modification of assessment centre approval procedures to ensure providers are offering appropriate assessment options.

- QCA to oversee the awarding body review of guidance to ensure consistency of policy across awarding bodies.

- ALI/LSC to review provider contracts and inspection guidance to ensure that APL is considered as a specified component of the provider contract and as a subsequent component of the inspection process.

Training provision

- The LSC should gather together good practice examples of existing contracts between providers and employers that set out the level of support to be made available to learners, and make these, or a framework contract based on good practice examples, available to providers.

Follow-up assessment

- LSC/ALI to:

    consider whether there should be minimum frequencies established for provider visits to learners in the workplace

    require providers to monitor and report on visit frequency and assessment rates (units attained per length of time) in addition to existing data on completion rates.

Staff development

- The DfES and QCA should consider whether ability to deliver training should be made a criterion that all awarding bodies should be required to include in their approval requirements. An alternative would be to offer different categories of approval to those offering full training and assessment services and to those offering assessment plus guidance/support for learners. The DfES and QCA should also consider

whether it would be wise to specify the nature of the guidance or support available, given that there is evidence of learners receiving advice on portfolio compilation alone, rather than any help in accessing support for skill development.

- DfES/LSC/QCA/the Standards Unit to consider whether it would be appropriate to specify minimum qualifications in either training or teaching for those involved in work-based training activities. Given that it is likely that individuals will continue to come into the sector from industry, DfES, LSC, QCA and the Standards Unit may wish to consider establishing a maximum length of time within which new tutors/assessors will be required to gain a teaching or training qualification. It will also be necessary to consider the maximum length of time to be allowed for up-skilling and qualification of existing staff, and how such development would be funded in the future.

- DfES/LSC to consider providing funding for any provider increasing their capacity to respond to basic skill needs by developing existing staff's skills in this area.

Auditing of funding for ATA

- DfES/LSC/QCA to consider moving to auditing based on random sampling of provider activity for awards for which there are component 'quota' of funding.

- DfES/LSC/QCA/ALI to consider whether any economies to inspection could be agreed by utilising awarding body information relating to training and assessment facilities.

1. Points for Good Practice

In November 2003 the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) invited tenders to conduct research to identify good practice in the 'Assess-Train-Assess' (ATA) approach to workforce development. This name refers to an approach in which there is an initial skill-gaps assessment, followed by tailored provision in the delivery of vocational training, and some follow-up assessment to determine progress, in many cases leading to a vocational award. This project is one of a suite of projects funded from the *Success for All* budget, which is aimed at encouraging good practice in FE and work-based learning.

The research was conducted by the Institute for Employment Studies between December 2003 and July 2004. Providers in the FE and work-based learning sectors were visited and interviewed about their approach to, and experience of, using ATA model of development. In this guide, the findings of the work and recommendations for good practice of providers are reported.

At the initial audit

Where providers are working with companies to meet their skill needs it is helpful at the outset to gain an overview of the skills of the workforce.

Providers may wish to consider the following issues when they conduct an initial audit.

How? There are two key issues to consider at this stage: what would be the best means by which to conduct a skills audit, and the potential sources of information. Sources of information could include:

'We would conduct a skills audit using "mainline directions" across the whole organisation. Assessors would "walk the job" with employees, and then use the information they gain through this process to design the questions that will be asked within mainline, for example, "how confident are you taking messages"'?
The Business Development Unit, Tameside College

● Managerial input

● In-company skills matrix

● Assessment of the needs of individuals or groups by discussion, questionnaire or skillscan (these could be in relation to their job or to support needs *ie* basic skills.)

● Observation or online assessment.

Techniques such as 'walking the job' (accompanying employees as they go about their work) can help to further contextualise the assessment information obtained from other assessment methods.

Who? It is worth considering who would be the best person to conduct the initial audit.

- Manager
- HR/training manager
- Assessor/tutor.

This is an important consideration, particularly in organisations where appraisal is not linked to identification of training needs. While some employers clearly have very sophisticated and structured approaches to identification of requisite skills and the associated training, others may be less able to identify the training needs of their employees. This is more likely to be the case when employers rely on external training provision.

Providers (and we primarily mean external providers, rather than in-house trainers, here) might wish to consider whether it would be beneficial to offer assistance to employers in identifying their staff training needs.

- This can provide an opportunity to gain more accurate information about the extent and depth of training needs.
- It may also reveal further development needs of the supervisors and managers themselves in identifying training needs. This in turn could lead to the opportunity to offer additional or improved management development provision.

Why? Some may consider a skills audit to be unnecessary. However, involvement in the initial skills audit can help to ensure:

- accurate identification of skills needs.
- that the correct level and type of training is provided to meet the employer's needs.
- that the relevant qualifications are identified for employees.
- that training appropriate to the current capability of the learners is provided which will help to improve attainment.
- improved learner success, increasing the likelihood of repeat business.

At the initial assessment

Whether or not there is an initial skills audit, ideally there should always be an assessment of any individual for whom training is being provided.

'A training needs analysis questionnaire goes to the companies and candidates to give some idea of where their shortfalls and strengths lie. Information from this can be programmed into the course that they come onto, or can be used as a basis for discussion with the employer.'
Polymer Training Ltd

'Skillscan works because it makes the candidates more confident. If the skillscan tells them that they already have 80 to 90 per cent of the skills to obtain the qualification, it makes it much easier to get them to sign up to and complete the remaining 10 to 20 per cent.'
Derby College

How? Again, a wide range of methods was in use and it would not be appropriate to be prescriptive on this point. Providers will want to use the approach that is most convenient and makes most sense with a particular client group.

Some general points emerged from the providers interviewed that readers may wish to consider.

- There are many commercial tests available, particularly for basic skills assessments, and these can be useful aids to the initial assessment.

- Computers had been used successfully by several providers; in particular these seem very attractive as an option with the basic skills area. They may make the learner feel more comfortable and can also help keep down the cost of assessment.

- However, while many learners respond well to computers, providers may wish to check whether potential learners have much experience with computers, as some people still find them off-putting.

- Skillscan, whether on paper or computer-based, can be very useful, particularly in helping ensure the learner registers for an award that they can achieve in their current job.

Who? A range of different personnel could be involved in this initial assessment, and providers might wish to consider who is the best-placed person — or who are the best-placed people — to contribute to this activity:

- Assessors and trainers.

- The line manager or HR specialist might already carry out this assessment role as part of the organisational appraisal process particularly where there are sophisticated HR systems in place that identify, for example, the required NVQ awards and/ or units that individuals need for their current job or in order to progress.

- It may be useful in some situations to divide the responsibility for basic skills assessments and vocational assessment between different specialist assessors and/or guidance personnel.

- Computers can lend extra credibility to the assessment process.

- Providers should remember that the most important person to actively involve in the initial assessment is the learner.

Why? The information gained from a thorough initial assessment is important for many reasons:

> *'PC-based assessment techniques, such as key skills builder are used to assess competency in basic literacy and numeracy. In addition, potential learners will be given some sort of practical test, such as a practical exercise to do in a realistic work environment.'*
> New College Durham

> *'Candidates find it easier to accept an assessment that the computer makes. The computer effectively de-personalises the judgement. There is a paper-based version but after a while even the most computer-phobic prefer the computer version.'*
> Stroud College

- Where basic skill needs exist it may be possible to draw down additional funding to address these.

- The assessment will make sure that people get the basic skills support they may need to cope with another award such as an NVQ.

- A thorough assessment of learners' current skills allows providers to place them on the correct level programme thus improving retention and attainment.

- Assessment of learners' current skill levels allows the provider to plan or modify the training to meet needs and capabilities.

- An in-depth assessment can facilitate the early award of credit for existing competences; this can prove a strong motivating point for learners, especially those who have not achieved previously.

Key questions for accrediting prior learning

As part of the initial assessment, providers should check whether the learners have any existing skills or certificates that might contribute towards the overall package of evidence submitted against one or more units. Achievement of a whole unit on the basis of prior evidence is rare. However, prior evidence can help providers to plan training and assessment in order to maximise the use of learners' existing skills and knowledge, and speed the attainment of units.

Who? In most of the organisations where APL was used within NVQs or MAs, vocational assessors were carrying it out.

- Initial assessment should normally be conducted by an assessor who has gained either D33 or A2 and is confident of their ability to make judgements about the value of available existing evidence.

- Where an assessor has not yet gained either D33 or A2, it is advisable that another, qualified assessor oversees the assessment planning process. For new staff or trainers working towards A2 this support will help to make sure that the assessor fully understands the ways in which supplementary evidence from the past may be incorporated into the evidence package.

How? The APL process has been seen as a largely portfolio-based approach in the past. APL is essentially the same as any assessment within NVQs – the process is to compile the evidence and judge it as a whole against the relevant standards. However, assessors may wish to bear in mind the following:

- APL evidence (particularly when it is documentary or otherwise tangible) may be used to supplement the overall evidence package, which could largely be comprised of

current assessments (including observation). APL does not have to be 'all-or-nothing'.

- Where a learner does not have tangible evidence from past activities but has relevant knowledge and experience, assessors can use the information gained from the initial assessment (including questions about the learner's existing skills and ability to supply any other evidence) to plan the assessment process so that those activities in which the learner is already competent are assessed first (where work schedules and demands allow).

Why? As indicated above, one of the important uses of information about the learner's existing skills and knowledge is to help plan the timing and progression of training and assessment.

- Taking into account what an individual knows at the outset will help speed progress through the assessment plan.

- The early recognition of skills gives people more confidence and the award of unit credit can be a powerful motivating tool.

- Where APL is not used formally as part of assessment, it can be used to inform the individual learning plan and details of training.

- For some organisations, a key consideration may be costs of certification of individual units. However, this should be considered against the gains to be made from motivating and retaining individuals who then achieve full awards in less time.

- The wishes of employers should be taken into account. Sometimes they may prefer an employee to take a whole qualification within their current work context. It may therefore be wise to check an employer's views on this point before agreeing any assessment plan with an employee.

Designing and delivering training

Wherever possible, it is wise to take into account learners' skills along with their needs and development opportunities at work when planning training.

Why?

- To reduce redundant training by building on existing skills
- To ensure that employees receive relevant training that meets their needs
- To ensure that training meets safety requirements in their current jobs
- To ensure employees are equipped with skills they can use in the workplace.

> *'All the information gathered is used to inform the individual learning plan… The individual learning plan also takes into account… the opportunities for applying and practising their learning on the job.'*
> New College Durham

> *'The "individual learning plan" is used to set target dates and structure the day release around their job requirements.'*
> North East Chamber of Commerce

Who? While it is primarily the responsibility of trainers or assessors to plan and deliver training programmes, workplace supervisors or managers can also contribute to this process.

- In some cases, a training programme or qualification may best be delivered through a formal partnership between an employer and an external provider to deliver different components of the training.

- Mentoring or coaching by a more experienced employee can help people to consolidate skills learnt off the job.

- For MAs, initial input for key skills or technical certificates can be followed by some form of developmental support and assessment in the workplace.

- In the majority of cases involving NVQs, the same person usually provides training input and assesses the individual. Where an assessor is not able to provide training input for the learners, the organisation should ensure that, as a minimum, the assessor is able to provide guidance to them in locating appropriate learning materials or, possibly, courses offered elsewhere.

How? Trainers should use information about the individual, their job and the support available to them to plan the programme of development.

- As part of this planning process, and particularly when people are seeking to obtain an NVQ, it is essential to take into account the capacity of the person's current role to support attainment of that qualification.

- Existing skills and knowledge should be considered in determining whether sections of a programme could safely be omitted.

- For many NVQs, one-to-one delivery in the workplace will be the best approach, while for issues such as health and safety and food hygiene, small groups may be optimal.

- Where small groups are used, an initial assessment will help the trainer to ensure that all participants in a group are at the same level at the outset, helping to prevent leaving some learners behind while others become bored.

- Where groups are used, it is advisable to find ways of working that allow the tutor to spend at least some time working with individuals.

- Consider whether technology can be used to deliver some of the training input. Basic skills is one area in which technology has been found to be a great help.

Formative and summative assessment

For learners on NVQ programmes, assessment is typically on-going. For some bespoke programmes, providers may need to

'We would build these skills up over about three months with support from a mentor in the workplace.'
City of Wolverhampton College

'Working alongside them (on the shopfloor) really helps… The learners are more at ease, more confident answering.'
TCAT

consider the appropriate type of feedback and assessment to give to learners.

How ? This assessment phase can be integrated into, or contribute towards, health and safety or appraisal procedures, or can be a stand-alone process.

- Some organisations combine the generation of assessment evidence with documentation *eg* for health and safety requirements.

- Other organisations use assessment to formally recognise people's new skills at work, linked to reward systems.

- Training providers may find that seconding assessors to a company for a few days a week for the purposes of assessment (*ie* the assessor is on the employer's premises full-time during the days in which they are carrying out assessment) can help make assessment a more economical process.

- Paper-free portfolio collation software can help make assessment less onerous for the candidate and speed up the process.

Who? In many of the case study organisations, providers were working with managers, supervisors or colleagues in generating the evidence to contribute towards assessment.

- While the provider will most often conduct the summative assessment, workplace-based assessors can be used to assist in the evidence-gathering process.

- Workplace colleagues can also help in assessment by contributing statements in the role of 'competent witness'.

- Where workplace personnel are involved, ideally there should be some formal agreement about the time that is allowed for these activities within their job requirements.

Why? For NVQs or other formal vocational awards, assessment is a necessary part of gaining the award. For bespoke training, there could also be benefits from a formal assessment.

- Assessment can be used to demonstrate a company has sufficient skills to operate equipment safely.

- Employees are given clear messages about the equipment they are, and are not, qualified to use. This prevents employees from feeling obliged to undertake dangerous work for which they are not qualified.

- Qualifications can fit into company appraisal, career development and promotion procedures.

Funding and economics of ATA

Although the ATA approach may appear to add to the demands on them, taking steps such as a thorough initial assessment can bring benefits to providers as well as learners.

- If it is not cost-effective to provide training on an individual basis, an initial assessment can be used to identify groups of people with similar needs and make training delivery more cost-effective.

- Identifying additional support needs (*eg* basic skills) may allow providers to draw down additional funds which in turn may allow them to hire additional support staff and provide an improved service to learners.

- The time spent in initial assessment may be recouped through subsequent savings in the time spent in training.

- The costs of assessment can be reduced by the use of locally-based assessors and/or assessors seconded to employers.

> *'The costs balance out because the front-loaded assessment means that tutor input time is saved later.'*
> Tameside College

Staffing and capacity

Involving employers in the development and assessment process can help increase capacity and be of direct benefit to learners, as well as helping to make the process more economical.

- Involving employers in the initial assessment and development of the programme can help facilitate the initial assessment and ensure learners gain support at work.

- The use of work-based competent witnesses can help facilitate the assessment process and reduce the time that providers need to spend in assessment.

- Workplace mentors can help learners consolidate their skills and can also contribute to the assessment process.

- Capacity can be increased by providing development in key skill support for vocational tutors/ assessors.

Staff development

Providers should consider the development needed by their staff ahead of introducing ATA systems.

- ATA seems to work best where assessment and training is delivered by the same individual. It is becoming increasingly clear that the pure assessment role is disappearing and that, as well as assessment skills, assessors need to be equipped with, as a minimum, guidance skills (to assist the learner in seeking learning support) or, ideally, training or teaching skills (to design and provide training to the learner).

- While skills additional to assessment may be needed, organisations should nonetheless not overlook the need to

keep tutors up to date in assessment, providing bridging courses to the newer awards where necessary.

- Those involved primarily in teaching may also find it useful to be offered the opportunity to develop skills and gain qualifications in assessment and verification.

- Skills in identifying training needs and planning the delivery of training are also increasingly important.

- Developing basic skills support in vocational assessors/ trainers can help to make sure that learners receive appropriate support.

- Providers should also consider whether staff need help to develop the skills involved in negotiating and co-ordinating work-based learning.

2. Case Studies

2.1 Wolverhampton College, part of the BlackCCAT CoVE

● Using mentoring to consolidate newly-learned skills in the workplace

The School of Engineering at Wolverhampton is the lead institution in the BlackCCAT CoVE. The learning they offer ranges from 14-16 to degree provision. They are one of the 47 current youth apprenticeship partnerships and also offer vocational GCSEs, NVQs at levels 2 and 3 across all the engineering disciplines, partnership arrangements with the University of Wolverhampton to offer apprenticeships and HNCs, and a foundation degree in project management. They also provide bespoke training for employers and in-company training and assessment. They are currently involved in a scheme to multi-skill employees using the ATA approach in a manufacturing enterprise in the West Midlands, and it is this project that is the focus of the case study.

2.1.1 Background

The company had gone through difficult times financially, and had made a sizeable proportion of its workforce redundant. The downsized company had moved into 'niche' production but still faced difficulties. In an attempt to improve performance of the company, the CoVE was asked if it could help. The multi-skilling programme described here was the outcome.

2.1.2 Identifying skill needs

In the initial phase the college was asked to take around 30 people through the multi-skilling programme. The first step was to analyse the component essential skills of the individual's current job and determine if any upskilling was needed there. All candidates were interviewed and the company provided the college with the training records for all participants.

'We look first at the individual's primary skills – those they use in their current job – and ask how can we enhance these? Then we look at the opportunities to develop them in "reciprocal skills".'

As a result of this process, each employee has an individual set of skills identified for development as an outcome of this initial analysis stage.

2.1.3 The development process

In the first stage of the development process the tutor asks the learners to look for the problems with a piece of equipment and to find out why it keeps breaking down. They then identify the skills that would be needed to remedy that problem *eg* electrical skills, motor mechanical skills or hydraulics.

> *'If the person is working as a mechanical fitter we might consider whether they could be developed in "reciprocal" areas such as hydraulic pneumatics, electrical engineering, or pipe fitting. An individual learning plan is developed based on what particular skills it is agreed they should learn, pneumatics, electrical etc.'*

These 'reciprocal' skills would be built up over about three months. The training input is carried out in a purpose-built training facility built on site. Training sessions usually consist of some input in the training facility followed by coaching on the shop floor.

2.1.4 Consolidation and assessment

In the consolidation phase learners need to have a 'buddy' or mentor to oversee them as they start to use these skills in the workplace. In the early days of this project the consolidation stage had broken down because of a lack of mentoring. Time pressures and concern about what would happen if the equipment kept on breaking down made individuals reluctant to volunteer. But the mentoring process is seen as vital to consolidation of the newly-acquired skills, and so the college asked the company to formally agree this role with the employees. The college works to develop mentoring skills in the volunteer mentors.

As part of the process of tracking skill development they have introduced the idea of 'skills passports' – booklets that consist of pages that state the different levels of competence attained, for example from changing a fuse to working with high voltage power supplies. As the learner progresses through the various levels of competence, the relevant page is signed-off by the mentor, the trainer/ assessor and the company health and safety manager.

The college has mapped the skills acquired against the business improvement techniques standards. The skills passport is then used as evidence towards the NVQ.

Despite some difficulties at the outset, the scheme has been a resounding success. Following on from the initial cohort of 30, the company has now asked the college to take a further 50 people through the scheme.

2.2 Telford College of Arts and Technology (TCAT) Business Development Unit

● Delivering in-company training

TCAT's Business Development Unit was originally set up by the principal of the college in response to falling numbers of part-time students. At the outset, five teaching staff were taken out of teaching jobs to establish the business development unit. There are now 120 staff working in the unit and they are the largest provider currently taking part in the Shropshire LLSC Employer Training Pilot. The case study focuses on training they are delivering to two companies in the region: Chequer Foods and Ricoh Photocopiers.

Chequer Foods

■ One-to-one training in the workplace

Chequer Foods produces pre-packed food and drink items for the catering sector.

The company offers its employees a wide range of qualifications that includes NVQs in food and drink production, warehousing and distribution, customer service, business administration, engineering, and teamleader management. Courses in health and safety, food hygiene and the European computer driving licence are offered.

The college has been working with Chequer Foods for five years. For the NVQ in food and drink production TCAT provides a trainer/assessor who typically would be based at the company for around two days in every week.

Delivering training on-the-job

The food and drink production work involves working on production equipment. For this reason, when an employee is first signed up for an NVQ, the food and drink assessor would work with a company engineer to discover training needs and identify practical tasks to form the basis for the training.

Training for the NVQ is exclusively provided on the job and one to one. Each employee is given training for individual pieces of production equipment, working with the trainer at the machine. The training would be provided either by the TCAT tutor or by a company employee if there is a particular issue such as how to set up a specific machine.

'I like being on the shopfloor, it's much better. The only time we take the candidate off [the shopfloor] is if there is a health and safety issue. Working alongside them really helps, they get the opportunity to identify what they know that otherwise they would not have, they are often surprised how much they know. They are more at ease, more confident in answering questions. [And] diverse evidence[1] too is produced on the job.'
TCAT trainer/assessor

The training offered has been expanded following introduction of the Employer Training Pilots. This has led to some employees being put forward for training who had never achieved an award previously.

'The employees were initially fearful when NVQs were introduced. They have usually achieved very little previously in terms of qualifications. But when they saw their colleagues going through they then became very keen. Feedback indicates they are very proud of their achievement.'
Training Manager, Chequer Foods

The training manager also noted that recent newspaper job advertisements asking for level 2 NVQs had helped people become aware that this is becoming an industry standard. This was helping encourage participation.

Progression from the level 2 awards

TCAT had cross-referenced the food hygiene and health and safety courses against the underpinning knowledge for food and drink production. Evidence of competence gathered for level 1 is often valid for level 2. If this is the case, the assessor and candidate agree what is to be used when discussing the assessment plan for level 2. This was the most usual type of APL in use in these awards. However, some employees had progressed from level 2 food and drink production to taking engineering (online) maintenance qualifications. A form of APL was used to facilitate this process.

'Level 2 food and drink production assesses actual problem-solving skills, and this is a requirement of the fault finding unit for an engineering maintenance qualification. We use this to identify key people who are capable of being trained to work at the level of the engineering NVQ. The [evidence from the] problem solving [assessments] is then used as prior evidence towards the engineering NVQ'.
TCAT tutor

Ricoh Photocopiers

■ **Linking work-based learning to career development and progression at work**

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[1] *ie* supplementary evidence such as examples of products produced by the candidate.

Again, a wide range of training provision was being delivered at the company: NVQs in management, quality, warehousing, customer service, business administration and performing manufacturing operations; a management development progr–amme, including team mentoring training for all co-ordinators and team leaders; and IT and basic skills training.

Identifying training needs

The recruitment process includes a set of assessment exercises. (This applies for both external and internal candidates.) The skills tests and other components of the assessment at recruitment provide the company with an analysis that identifies gaps between what the candidate brings to the job and what the company wants. After recruitment, the main time at which training needs are identified is at performance review twice a year. The 'identification of training need form' identifies business needs and the individual's own training needs.

Training, development and progression opportunities

Most of the training for NVQs is carried out one to one and on the job. Every person is allowed one hour a working week to train. Assessment is carried out by TCAT at the workplace. The assessor liaises with team leaders to make sure that any disruption is minimised.

The company has set up an internet site that displays a job matrix, indicating what qualifications are relevant to each of the jobs in the company. Each job description contains a named NVQ for the post,[1] and shows what would be involved in undertaking the award, *eg* the performance criteria and underpinning knowledge. The website also shows information on the training that is available to everyone and the potential career progression routes available.

For internal candidates, the company runs a scheme that allows people who lack the experience to be assessed for an NVQ needed for progression into a higher level job. Where individuals express an interest in progressing to a different job, the company offers development through training either at the college or the company. They would then have to demonstrate to the assessor that they can apply those skills vocationally. Once this had been achieved, the candidate might be considered for promotion. When the candidate has moved into the new job he/she would work with the assessor for that area to meet the evidence requirements for the relevant NVQ.

The development programme also benefits the company, which has recruitment difficulties for some posts. For example, team leaders need to have level 3 skills. The development programme,

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[1]   TCAT helped the company to produce this matrix.

linked to attainment of the NVQ, helps the company overcome such recruitment difficulties.

2.3 North Devon College's Manufacturing CoVE

● **Developing basic skill support skills in vocational tutors**

The majority of provision by North Devon College's Manufacturing CoVE is in engineering and manufacturing, including the packaging and processing industries. The CoVE uses a variety of delivery modes, including extensive on-site programmes, day-release and e-learning/ distance learning. North Devon College has operated 'mobile skills centres' for some time. These are large articulated trailers similar to mobile libraries which are equipped with computers and technical engineering equipment. They are designed to provide high quality training facilities away from the college main site at factories and in local communities. The range of technical equipment has been increased with CoVE capital funding and enables effective support of an extensive range of work-based learning groups. Other departments in the college provide IT outreach training to local communities using smaller vehicles and laptop computers.

While most of the vocational delivery takes place in workplaces around the county, the majority of basic skill support had been provided centrally within the college. In this case study, the work of the CoVE in developing basic skill support skills in vocational tutors is described.

Background

Most vocational learners who are registered with the CoVE receive training at their workplace. However the majority of basic skill support services are housed centrally, at the college. The basic skills section was keen to ensure that the support needs of all learners were identified and that all learners had access to uniform levels of support. To address this issue the basic skills manager had offered tutors and assessors the opportunity to acquire basic skills assessment and support skills.

> *'Getting their needs recognised is vital, the importance of getting work-based assessors who have a much closer contact with the candidates [trained in these skills] is tremendous.'*

The college's work-based tutors and assessors have responded enthusiastically and are now being supported as they work their way through a new level 3 qualification being piloted in adult learning subject support.[1] Across the college, 34 members of staff

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[1] A level 2 qualification is being developed in adult learning subject support which covers the skills necessary in identifying needs and

were going through the level 3 training programme and at the time of the research, three of these were work-based assessors from the CoVE. The basic skills manager had found that often in the past the work-based assessors had spotted the more obvious basic skills problems themselves. However, these problems emerged once the training was underway and made it more difficult to obtain any extra funding and support. This disrupted assessment plans which were already in place. The aim is to give the workplace assessors the skills and encouragement to do this at the start of the training process, and on a more formal basis.

> *'The hope is that this will encourage and instil a uniform quality across the division to ensure that all those who need support are identified and supported. Getting the support off-site is important as work-based learners need to receive the same support and to the same standard as in-college training.'*

Mobile assessments of basic and key skills

The college uses the 'basic and key skills builder' to assess candidates initially. This is available in computerised and paper-based forms.[1] CoVE capital funding has increased the resources that staff can use to support their roles. New resources include laptops and mobile printers, allowing staff to take basic skills testing off site. At present, the college tries to ensure that all learners are tested during their first six weeks on a programme, although this is expected to improve when tutors are able to carry out these assessments themselves. The ultimate aim of the college is to embed basic skills support into all training provision. While this is planned across all types of provision, they believe that the maximum benefit will be felt amongst their work-based learners, as this group has the highest levels of unacknowledged and un-addressed basic skills problems.

2.4 Stroud College

● **Using initial assessment to confirm job development opportunities, identify existing skills and target provision**

Stroud College has set up a CoVE in adult care provision. The main qualifications offered through the CoVE are the care NVQs at Levels 2, 3 and 4 and the NVQ for registered managers. However, they also offer the Edexcel national diploma and level 2 first diploma and the CPP first stage award, as well as short courses in safe handling of medicines and other subjects. Their

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signposting the way to support services. The level 3 qualification focuses primarily on those whose role involves provision of support.

[1] It should be noted that several of the organisations visited reported favourably on use of this particular assessment package.

main clients are social services and independent care homes but they also provide some bespoke certificated training for the local NHS and social services department. In this case study the approach to initial assessment of work-based learners registered on NVQ programmes is described.

The initial assessment

The skillscan is an audit of the candidate's skill and the NVQ department believes that it is very important that this appraisal is undertaken by the candidate themselves. It is used to identify whether the candidate has the appropriate experience and appropriate work responsibilities for the proposed NVQ. While learners should be offered any development support needed to progress in a qualification, without appropriate assessment opportunities within their current job role, learners are unlikely to be able to attain the targeted award. The CoVE had found a relatively large number of candidates either putting themselves forward, or being put forward by their employers, for the registered manager qualification for which they had neither the appropriate experience nor the job responsibilities.

> *'This can be rather like the candidate starting and then hitting a brick wall. It is very important not to sign people up for qualifications that they won't be able to achieve. As such the skillscan avoids people attempting inappropriate qualifications and potentially putting them off learning altogether.'*

The initial skillscan allows the learner, where necessary, to consider the alternative options or units that they might be more likely to complete successfully.

The first assessments can take place either in the college or at the employer's premises. The college had used CoVE funding to purchase a laptop computer specifically to allow them to take computerised assessments out to employers. The tutors have found that candidates find it easier to accept any assessment that the computer makes than any similar assessment that an assessor might make.

> *'The computer effectively de-personalises the judgement. There is a paper-based version, but after a while even the most computer-phobic prefer the computer version. We even find candidates coming into college and running the skillscan to check their progress towards the qualification.'*

The initial assessment is also used to check whether candidates have any special needs. Where this is the case the college is able to draw down extra funding. Using CoVE money and the extra funding obtained on the basis of the initial basic skill assessment, the college has been able to generate sufficient funds to employ a peripatetic special needs tutor who works with the candidates to help them prepare evidence and develops their basic skills.

This initial assessment process has now been taken up within the early years qualifications offered by the college, partly because it is in the same learning (subject) area and partly because the approach is now beginning to be taken up more widely in the college as a whole.

The college uses accreditation of prior certification to allow candidates to claim credit towards part of the knowledge-base of target awards (where the award is relevant and current). The college would ask the candidate to write a reflective piece outlining what they learnt from the previous qualification that is relevant to their current work and target award.

Where an individual has progressed from a level 2 to a level 3 qualification, some of the units from the previous qualification are often relevant. In these circumstances, the NVQ department would ask the candidate to look through the unit and write a description of how they have moved from level 2 to level 3 in their work. The department asks the candidate to obtain witness statements to support this transition. The Level 4 qualification can be used in an APL process towards the first year of their early years foundation degree (accredited by the University of Gloucestershire).

2.4.1 After the assessment

The NVQ Department has found the skillscan useful because, as well as identifying development needs, it encourages the candidates to collect the necessary evidence or witness testimony to show that they are already performing certain functions.

Exemption from modules or from assignments may be offered as a result of the initial assessment, with the modification of classroom-based training and the way evidence is collected. Some candidates are better able to make use of witness evidence. The college has tried using video evidence but have found that many candidates are averse to this means of collecting evidence.

Ensuring that a candidate's job will allow them the assessment opportunities to complete their intended award has improved NVQ completion rates. This process has prevented people finding out that they are unable to undertake assessments and withdrawing from the course after having registered.

2.5 Oxfordshire Skills for Health

● Bite-sized learning in the workplace

The Oxfordshire Skills for Health project is an initiative aimed at delivering a wide range of learning opportunities. The main awards include NVQs, basic and related generic skills, English for speakers of other languages, IT and food hygiene. The group also

does some work with management teams and at one Trust they are launching a department-wide appraisal system for facilities staff, first line managers and supervisors. The group is about to pilot a new initiative to deliver communication skills in the workplace in 'bite-sized' chunks of around 10-15 minute sessions.

2.5.1 Identifying training needs

In 2001, the hospital agreed to a trial in which a full needs analysis would be conducted for 100 staff, with an offer of 10 hours learning for anyone who wanted it. In the initial analysis of training needs, one-to-one interviews were conducted with operatives, managers and supervisors. The interview covered basic skills, the employee's experience of the organisation and industrial relations issues (perceived organisational support).

> 'My view is that organisations have needs, individuals have aspirations. With basic skills, if you look at needs, you will only get [recruit] either the very confident, or the browbeaten individuals. So you should talk instead about learning opportunities. You look for organisational needs, but you offer the individual learning opportunities.'

The hospital was enthusiastic after the first analysis unearthed a range of organisational needs. They felt these would not have emerged if the initial identification of training needs had been confined just to basic skills issues.

2.5.2 The training

The team delivers training in sessions organised to fit around staff shift patterns, including at weekends. Some training is delivered in the workplace, for instance, one tutor meets with kitchen staff in the refectory in which they work. The tutors keep records of attendance at the sessions and of any particular difficulties such as staff shortages that prevent people attending training.

2.5.3 A new project in 'bite-sized learning'

In hospitals, it can be difficult to release people for training. The group is developing a new, 'bite-sized' approach to delivering *English in the workplace*, based on entry 3 level of the adult ESOL core curriculum. The programme has a functional syllabus, with titles such as 'getting feedback', 'passing on messages' and 'health and safety'. Maps and cards have been devised to prompt on what is taught.

> '[Tutors will go] into the workplace and teach on the spot with the permission of the supervisor or manager. Ideally this would be – a 15 minute session, possibly a two minute revision session in the corridor.'

The new approach involves a fundamental shift to training delivery within the workplace. The group was about to organise training sessions to help the tutors understand how a 15 minute

session would be planned, and would also be using role plays to consider how it would feel walking into the workplace, being a learner, interacting with staff, building relationships.

> *'There are issues to consider such as how do you create a teaching space, pick your time, etc. You need to signal when you start and finish. And you need to signal when people need to move out of one mode of thinking (working now) to another (learning now). '*

Trainers would visit learners three or four times a week. They were optimistic that the shorter times would mean that release for training was less of an issue.

Trainers' work was leading them to consider how to track their own behaviour/ activities and effectiveness, with the intention that this will become part of the methodology that is developed. They were also starting to think about how the methods adopted could be developed in the future.

> *'It is expensive – there are cost implications in any one-to-one work. At present it is low-tech but in a few years time we might perhaps move to using palmtops. But there is a need for people to feel they can take the cards and do it themselves [employees cascading training in the workplace] but there is the question of how would we track that? With dyads we can write it up immediately afterwards. It is completely different from any training we received as teachers. And there is the trust issue, how do we know what trainers are spending their time on? [But] the teacher's log will capture a multitude of info – time details, absenteeism, the teacher's own reflections and events such as someone saying "you're in the way".'*