

Initial Assessment of Learning and Support Needs and Planning Learning to Meet Needs

May 2001

This document was produced under contract to the Department for Education and Employment. The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education and Employment or any other Government Department or those of the Learning and Skills Council.

Raising Standards Division
Study and Good Practice Transition Team
Level 3 North
Moorfoot
Sheffield
S1 4PQ

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Department for
Education and Employment



QUALITY and PERFORMANCE
IMPROVEMENT DISSEMINATION



Learning+Skills Council



Foreword

This is the penultimate Good Practice Guide in the QPID series prior to responsibility for developing good practice passing to the Learning and Skills Council.

It is fitting then that this Guide should be addressing one of the major weaknesses identified by the Training Standards Council Chief Inspector in his Annual Report – the need for improvements in the quality of Initial Assessment and Individual Learning Plans.

The Guide is the product of close working between all the partners responsible for Raising Standards in post-16 learning and we would like to thank the Training Standards Council, Employment Service and provider network for their support.

“The Employment Service fully endorses the good practice contained within this Guide and have welcomed the opportunity to work with the Department for Education and Employment, the Learning and Skills Council, the Training Standards Council and Providers on its content. Initial Assessment and Individual Learning Plans continue to be highlighted as areas to be addressed in the Training Standards Council reports on New Deal for Young People. By adopting this model of good practice we intend to support providers in delivering this continuous improvement process.

The Employment Service Quality Framework provides the basis of our approach to maintaining and improving quality in Employment Service funded learning provision from April 2001. One of the key principles is that all learners should have their needs properly assessed and reviewed at the start, during, and at the end, of their period of learning. Provision of high quality Initial Assessment and then planning learning to meet individual needs is an important part of the process, to ensure that learners receive a high quality experience as they progress towards employment”

Clare Dodgson, Chief Operating Officer, Employment Service

“The awards for individual learning depend on a solid starting-point from which progress can be measured. This is nowhere truer than in NVQs, and programmes like the Modern Apprenticeships which depend on them. These are potential world-beaters.

How vital it is then, that we should develop reliable techniques for establishing each Learner’s baseline of knowledge, experience and skill through improving Initial Assessment and Individual Learning Plans. This Guide will be invaluable to providers as they take up the many opportunities that now exist to expand lifelong learning. From advanced technical awards to basic skills training which may lead to only a small part of a qualification, the methods described here will add to reliable measurement of progress”

David Sherlock, Chief Inspector, Adult Learning Inspectorate

Placing the Learner at the Heart of the Process was a key theme in the Learning to Succeed White Paper. Local Learning and Skills Councils and their providers have a major role to play in turning this into a reality. Accurately assessing the needs and ability of the individual Learner to realise their personal goals and potential is key to developing a meaningful Individual Learning Plan. This Guide has been designed to help you manage that process. Equally important is the need to ensure that the Learner has ownership of their individual Learning Plan. Regular reviews involving the Provider, Learner and the Employer are essential. Problems can be identified and actions agreed which will help to keep the Learner motivated and focused and help to raise retention rates.

We believe this Good Practice Guide will make an important contribution to achieving our shared aim of **Raising Standards**. We hope you agree.

Avril Willis
Director of Quality and Standards
Learning and Skills Council

Suzanne Orr
Divisional Manager
Raising Standards Division



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Introduction

About this Guide

This Guide has been produced for providers, and their funding organisations, who are responsible for undertaking initial assessment and producing individual learning plans within government-funded work-based learning programmes, including New Deal. It is also for staff in careers services and the Employment Service, and specialist providers of initial assessment services, who are involved in initial assessment prior to referring learners to work-based learning programmes.

The Guide will help providers respond to the requirements of the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) - formally the Training Standards Council (TSC) - as set out in its inspection frameworks “**Raising the Standard**” and “**Partners for Quality**” and from April 2001 the “**Common Inspection Framework**” and some of the recurring weaknesses identified in the 1999-2000 Annual Report of the Chief Inspector “**Reaching New Standards**”. These include:

- **Only 15 per cent of providers conduct initial assessment systematically, with 10 per cent conducting no initial assessment at all.**
- **Few providers carry out initial assessment of key skills.**
- **Nearly 25 per cent of all providers have no procedures for accrediting prior learning or experience and have no staff qualified to carry out this task.**
- **Whilst most learners have learning plans, few are individualised to take account of each learner’s needs.**
- **Individual learning plans are seldom used as working documents or updated to reflect growing accomplishment or new learning targets.**

The effects of these weaknesses is that learners may choose the wrong option or take longer to complete their learning programme than necessary. They are also at higher risk of dropping out before completion as a result of inappropriate training or lack of support.

This Guide aims to provide guidance on:

- What initial assessment is, what information should be collected during the process, roles and responsibilities and when should it take place.
- What methods are available to undertake initial assessment.
- How the outcomes of initial assessment should be used in developing the individual’s learning plan.
- What constitutes an effective individual learning plan and how to ensure that it is a working document.
- Engaging the learner in initial assessment and the development of their learning plan.

- How initial assessment and the development of learning plans should be both managed and quality assured.
- The skills and knowledge required by staff to undertake effective initial assessment and to prepare and monitor individual learning plans.

The Guide includes examples of the effective practice demonstrated by a range of providers and includes private training companies, voluntary providers, further education colleges and employers involved in work-based learning.

The Guide has been researched and written by Lynne Clough and Alison Foster of QSIS Consultants on behalf of the Department for Education and Employment.

Terminology

The following terms are used in the Guide:

'Learner' – An individual who is learning by receiving training and support. It includes 'trainees', 'clients' and 'students'.

'Learning programme' – The programme being followed by the learner, such as a foundation modern apprenticeship in retail, an NVQ level 1 in horticulture, or a Life Skills programme. It includes 'training programmes' and 'courses'.

'Learning goals' - The goals to be achieved by the learner, including the development of specific skills, knowledge and competence. This will include formal qualifications or units where appropriate.

'Individual learning plan' – A plan designed for each learner showing the training and support they will receive in order to fulfil their learning goals and their learning programme. It includes 'individual training plan' and 'individual development plan'.

'Provider' – Includes all organisations who deliver any aspect of the work-based learning process. Includes 'training suppliers', 'colleges' and deliverers of Life Skills programmes.

'The work-based learning process' – A series of stages which a learner will typically go through during the course of their work-based learning programme. Includes recruitment, initial assessment, induction, design of learning plan, delivery of on- and off-the-job training, progress reviews, assessment and verification.

How to use this Guide

It is not intended that this Guide should be read from cover to cover but as a reference document in the following ways:

- Particular sections may provide useful background information.
- A self-assessment checklist will allow you to evaluate your current practices in initial assessment and individual learning plans.

- Example forms and policies may be copied or adapted to suit your own purposes. An electronic version of the guide has been placed on the QPID website www.dfee.gov.uk/gpsnet. Sections 9-12 have been produced in Microsoft Word to allow users to download and adapt to meet individual needs.
- The useful information section should provide a reference source for where you can obtain further information on initial assessment, including available tools and products, and individual learning plans.

Need Further Information or Help on ...

The key features of effective initial assessment and learning plans

➔ [GO TO SECTION 2](#)

What is initial assessment, why is it important, who is involved and when is it undertaken?

➔ [GO TO SECTION 3](#)

What methods can be used during initial assessment to collect information about the learner?

➔ [GO TO SECTION 4](#)

What is the purpose of individual learning plans, what should be included in them, how should they be monitored and reviewed?

➔ [GO TO SECTION 5](#)

The skills and knowledge required by staff to undertake effective initial assessment and produce sound learning plans?

➔ [GO TO SECTION 6](#)

Managing and quality assuring initial assessment and individual learning plans?

➔ [GO TO SECTION 7](#)

Useful information sources?

➔ [GO TO SECTION 8](#)

How well do you conduct initial assessment and produce individual learning plans?

➔ [GO TO SECTION 9](#)

Examples of providers using different methods to undertake initial assessment?

➔ [GO TO SECTION 10](#)

A format for summarising the outcomes of initial assessment?

➔ [GO TO SECTION 11](#)

Examples of providers' learning plans?

➔ [GO TO SECTION 12](#)



The Key Features of Effective Initial Assessment and Learning Plans

Initial Assessment

- All learners should undergo a period of initial assessment, the purpose of which is to identify their learning and support needs.
- The identification of a learner's learning and support needs is critical as it represents the first stage in the learning cycle and on which all other stages depend.
- The learner lies at the centre of the learning process and needs to be fully engaged in the initial assessment process and the development of their learning plan. It is important that they feel that is done **with** them and not **to** them.
- Initial assessment involves the collection of a wide range of information to form a coherent picture of the individual. This information should be used to place them on an appropriate pre-vocational or vocational learning programme which matches their skills, knowledge and abilities, in an appropriate occupational area and to draw up a learning plan which addresses their individual needs.
- There are a number of initial assessment methods available. It is for training providers to determine which methods are most appropriate for their learners to form a comprehensive picture of their learning and support needs. Different methods may be appropriate in different occupational areas. It is not acceptable for initial assessment to be more thorough in some areas than others.
- The responsibility for carrying out initial assessment of learners rests with providers. Other organisations and agencies with which the provider works, including employers, may well be in a position to provide relevant information in relation to the learning and support needs of learners.

Learning Plans

- Every learner should have a learning plan which details the training and support they will receive to help them fulfil their learning programme and **how** the objectives will be achieved.
- Individual learning plans should be designed separately for each learner. The employer, the learner and the trainer are all involved in producing the plan.

- Learning plans should include information on the learner, their learning programme, their learning goals, the results of initial assessment, induction training, on and off-the-job training, programme reviews, assessment and additional support arrangements.
- An effective learning plan is used regularly as a working document to which the learner, the workplace supervisor and the trainer regularly refer. It is reviewed and revised to reflect the learners growing capability and changing learning needs.
- It is likely that a learning plan will be fairly detailed in the short term, for example the next 3-6 months, and more of an outline for the longer term.
- The learning plan may be written on a single form or it may consist of several separate parts in different formats.

Initial Assessment

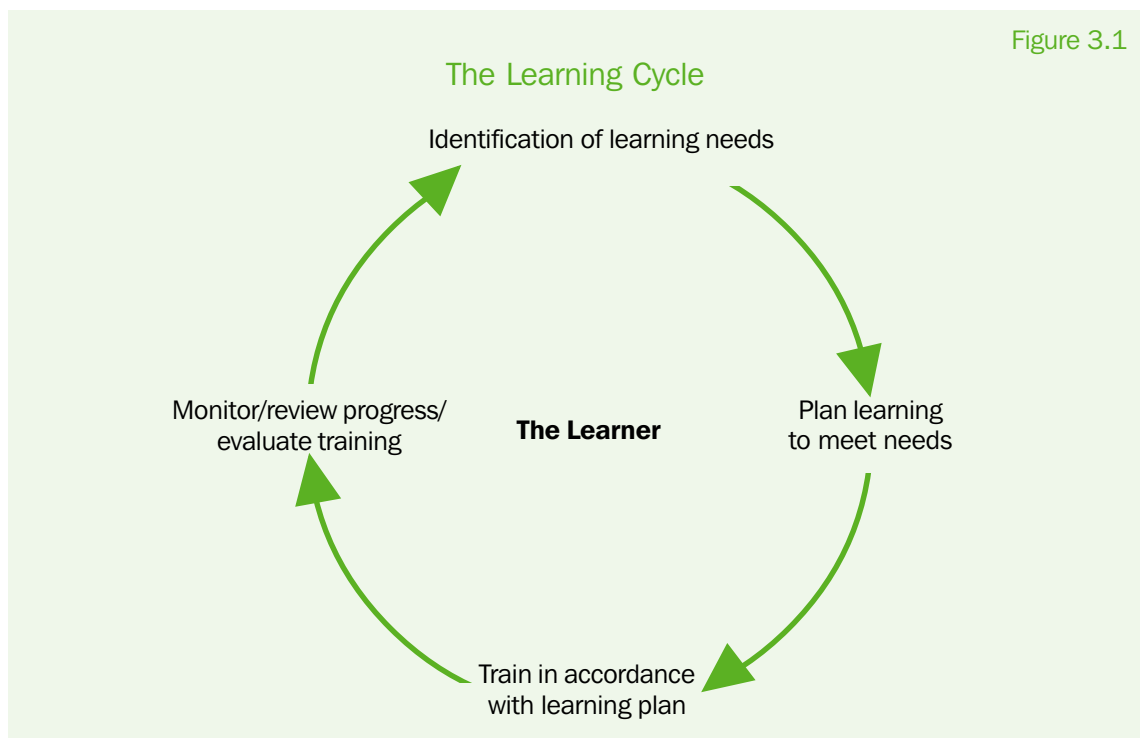
What is Initial Assessment?

All learners are entitled to undergo a period of initial assessment. Initial assessment is the process of identifying an individual's learning and support needs to enable the design of an individual learning plan which will provide the structure for their learning. In other words it determines the learner's starting point for their learning programme.

Learning needs are the skills, knowledge and competence which a learner needs to acquire during the course of their learning programme. Support needs are the additional help that a learner requires to enable them to address barriers which may otherwise prevent them from fulfilling their learning programme.

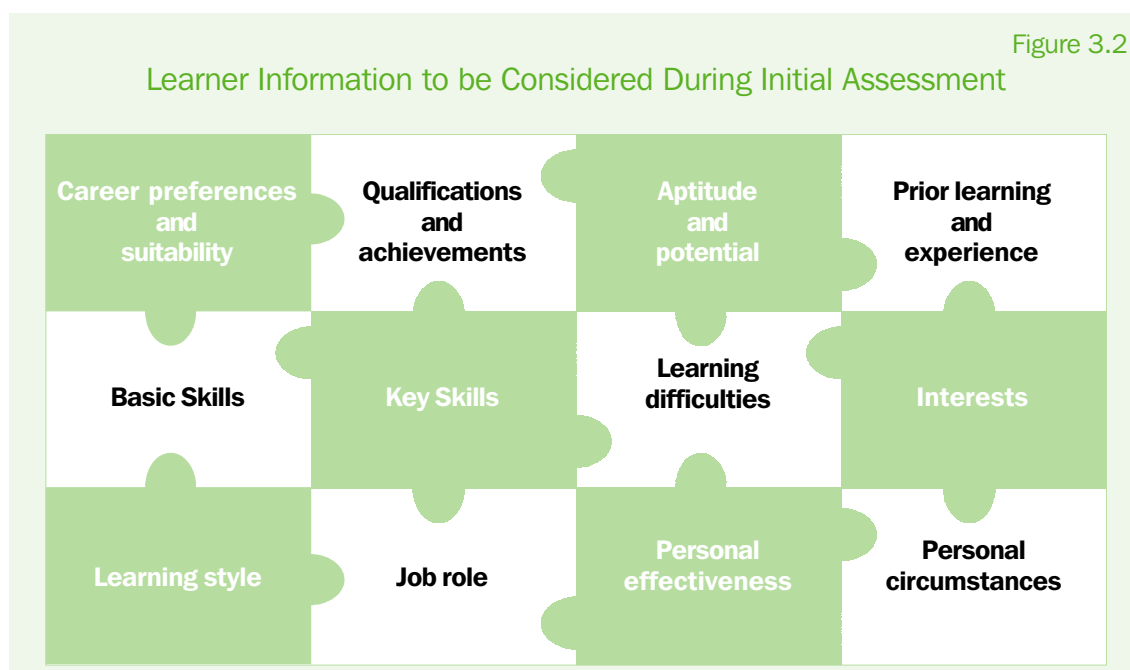
Initial Assessment is a critical process because it represents the first stage in the learning cycle (see Figure 3.1). Failure to accurately identify an individual's learning needs may result in a learning plan, and a learning programme, which does not address those learning needs. The subsequent evaluation of learning and training is unlikely therefore to show any benefits to the learner.

The White Paper "**Learning to Succeed**" places the learner at the centre of a system which is driven by their needs. This can only happen if they are actively engaged in every stage of the learning cycle.



Initial assessment commences at the point of entry, from the first contact with the prospective learner, and continues until the point that an individual learning plan is completed. Further learning and support needs will inevitably be identified through the review process and should be reflected in updates to individual learning plans. Initial assessment should take place over a number of days or weeks. It should not be confined to one session.

An individual's learning and support needs are identified from the collection and analysis of a wide range of information. Figure 3.2 depicts the different types of information which need to be considered during the initial assessment process. It is shown as a jig-saw to demonstrate that the process is one of building up a series of interlocking pieces of information to form a coherent picture of the individual.



Career preferences and suitability

The career aims of learners who are unemployed when they join their learning programme need to be identified. This points them towards an appropriate occupational area for their learning programme, or a suitable option within New Deal, or provides a focus for pre-vocational learning. Career choice is dependant upon many factors including: qualifications and achievements, abilities, interests, subjects studied at school, skills, knowledge and understanding of chosen occupation, jobs available in the local labour market, as well as an individuals aptitude to undertake certain types of work.

If a learner remains undecided about an occupational area at the end of the initial assessment process, a series of activities should be incorporated in their learning plan to help them decide.

Qualifications and achievements

Information about a learner's qualifications and achievements can provide an indication of their general level of ability. The qualifications and achievements can indicate strengths in certain subject areas which may then inform their choice of career. It can help in deciding which programme is most appropriate for the learner and whether the level of the planned programme and qualifications are appropriate. Information on existing qualifications may indicate weaknesses in particular areas. For example, low grades in GCSE maths and English, or the absence of these subjects, may suggest basic skill needs which require further investigation during initial assessment.



Ability and potential

Some learners' educational qualifications and achievements may not reflect their true ability or potential. Failure to achieve educational qualifications could be caused by a variety of reasons. The learners may have 'dropped-out' of school early. They may have missed large parts of their schooling due to illness or disability. There may be other reasons. Academic qualifications are not necessarily an indicator of success in vocational learning programmes. A learner's ability and potential needs to be initially assessed so that accurate decisions can be made about the type of programme and level from which they would most benefit.

Prior learning and experience

The purpose of establishing a learner's prior experience and learning is to ensure that he or she does not waste time in repeating learning in areas in which they are already competent. If they do, they may make slower progress in achieving their NVQ and key skills qualifications. Learners may, for example, have previously attended other programmes and started to work towards qualifications. They may have achieved units towards an NVQ. They may have achieved other qualifications which awarding bodies accept as evidence towards the qualification which they are now seeking. Young people choosing to follow apprenticeship programmes may have achieved some key skills units previously. They may have gained experience whilst undertaking GNVQs, which already meets part of their apprenticeship framework. Those learners who have gained good GCSE qualifications in English, mathematics and information technology may be ready to learn these skills at a higher level. Learners who are employed when they begin their NVQ learning programme will already have some occupational skills and may be able to demonstrate competence in certain areas.

Basic Skills

During initial assessment it is important to identify those learners who require support with basic skills during their learning programme. Their current level of basic skills should be assessed and the specific areas in which they require help and support should be identified.

Key Skills

Some learners follow learning programmes where the achievement of specific key skills are a mandatory requirement. As for basic skills, the trainers should understand each learner's current level of key skills and where strengths and weaknesses exist.

Learning difficulties

Some learners have specific learning difficulties or disabilities which may not be obvious or have been previously recognised, which require specialist learning provision and support. It is vital that these are identified during initial assessment in order that they can be addressed in the individual's learning plan.

Interests

Collecting information on a learner's hobbies and interests may assist the process of guiding them to make suitable career and learning choices. Within some pre-vocational programmes, collecting information on a learner's interests is important in enabling the design of innovative learning programmes which engage the learner.

Learning Style

Each person has a preferred way of learning. Some people learn best by undertaking practical activities, others prefer to read books, whilst others learn by listening or sharing ideas. Many people who fail to learn academically do so as a result of teaching styles which are not conducive to their own learning styles. If learning is to be effective it is important that trainers are aware of the ways in which their learners are best able to learn, so that they can use appropriate teaching styles.

Job role

For learners working towards one or more NVQs, it is important to consider whether their job allows them to develop the necessary competence to achieve the full NVQ. If there are any gaps, the trainer should consider how the learner will be given the opportunity to develop competence in these areas when developing their individual learning plan.

Personal effectiveness

Skills in personal effectiveness are important in enhancing the employability of learners. The skills include self-confidence, motivation, presentation, taking responsibility, attendance, time-keeping, reliability, respect for others and decision-making. Many learners need to develop these as part of their learning programme. Others need to develop them in preparation for entering mainstream learning.

Personal circumstances

Some learners have personal problems which need to be addressed during their learning programme. Some learners face social problems such as homelessness, behavioural difficulties or they suffer alcohol or drug addiction. Others may have certain medical conditions which prevent them from learning and working in certain areas. They may have child care commitments which effect the times they can attend or they may have difficulty in attending training sessions through lack of public transport. These types of problem need to be identified during initial assessment so that ways can jointly be found to either overcome the problems or find ways round them.

Equality of Opportunity

Access to learning is an important part of promoting equality of opportunity which is of paramount importance for work-based learning providers. Providers must not discriminate against or discourage any potential learner. The identification of individual needs is important in ensuring that flexible provision can be developed to meet needs where possible.

Within work-based learning there is still marked stereotyping in choice of occupational areas with women dominating in business administration, retailing, hairdressing, health and social care and men in engineering, construction, motor-vehicle and increasingly Information and Communication Technology. Minority ethnic groups are seriously under-represented in traditional craft sectors. Providers must avoid stereotyping not only in terms of gender and ethnicity but also in terms of disability, age and geographical factors.

Using the Information Collected

Information collected during the initial assessment process should allow the learner to:

- Be placed on an appropriate pre-vocational or vocational learning programme which matches their skills, knowledge and abilities.
- Work towards a level of qualification which is appropriate to their level of skills, knowledge and ability.
- Be placed in work in an appropriate occupational area, where this is relevant to the learning programme.
- Have all their learning and support needs identified, to enable a comprehensive individual learning plan to be designed.

Roles and Responsibilities

Learners

The learner lies at the heart of the initial assessment process. Engaging them is critical in ensuring that their learning is effective. Without self knowledge of their current levels of competence and recognition from others of their strengths and needs they are unlikely to see the relevance of their learning plan. Learners need to understand why they are being asked for certain information and what the purpose is of any assessment activities that they might be asked to take part in. If they do not understand they may feel confused, resentful or devalued which may in turn have a negative effect on their learning.

Effective initial assessment helps learners to:

- Have a better understanding of their career options.
- Make realistic choices about their career aims.
- Identify what they have already learnt and what they need to learn.
- Understand themselves better through knowledge of their strengths and development needs.
- Feel valued and motivated by the support given to them in identifying their individual needs.
- Play a part in the development of their learning plan through understanding their own learning and support needs.
- Take responsibility for their own learning.
- Measure their progress by providing a clear baseline of where they are at the start of their learning programme.
- Complete their learning programme and achieve their qualification, where appropriate, through accurate identification of their required needs and support.

Providers

One of the criticisms which learners often cite is that they feel that they are repeatedly asked for the same information over and over again by different providers during the initial assessment process. The provider who has overall responsibility for initial assessment should seek to gather as much information as possible from other relevant sources to try and avoid this happening. Careers services, for example, may assess vocational choice prior to the referral of a learner to a provider. The sharing of this information may save the provider a significant amount of time when undertaking further initial assessment with the learner. Information may be available from schools on the nature of a person's learning difficulties and the type of support that is likely to be required. Employers may be involved in assessing occupational suitability. Other providers may have already undertaken basic skill assessments or other assessments.

Providers also have the responsibility of ensuring that those who undertake initial assessment activities have the necessary skills and knowledge. See Section 6 - Skills, Knowledge and Development of Staff – for further guidance on this subject.

During the course of the initial assessment, providers need to consider whether they are best placed to meet the identified needs of the prospective learner. It is possible that another provider would better meet the learner's needs and the learner should be referred to that provider.

Some providers may only be responsible for undertaking initial assessment, not for producing the learning plan. It is their responsibility to inform the relevant provider of the outcome of the initial assessment to avoid the process having to be repeated at a later stage. They should have an in-depth knowledge of the providers to which they refer learners, in order to be confident that their learning and support needs can be met.

It is the responsibility of all providers to ensure equality of opportunity throughout the initial assessment process. All learners are entitled to an equally thorough initial assessment. Providers will select those initial assessment methods which will allow them to build up an accurate picture of the learning and support needs of each learner.

Effective initial assessment helps those who provide learning programmes to:

- Understand what the learner needs to learn and the support they require.
- Plan and provide learning which meets the needs of learners, avoiding unnecessary training, and thereby saving costs and making better use of resources.
- Measure progress and success from an accurate starting point.
- Improve learner retention and achievement levels.
- Improve relationships with employers by providing appropriate training and support, and creating more motivated learners.
- Improve relationships with funding organisations through higher retention and achievement levels.

Employers

Employers have a critical role to play in the initial assessment process, in circumstances where learners spend a high proportion of their time in the workplace. Employers are best placed to determine whether an individual is suitable to undertake a job in a particular occupational area. The employer needs to be involved in matching the relevant NVQ to the job which the learner will be undertaking. The employer also needs to be involved in selecting the appropriate optional units within the NVQ and the additional skill components from the framework, if the learner is an apprentice. The employer should understand the learning needs of the individual in order to ensure that appropriate learning opportunities are made available, both on- and off-the-job, to develop the required levels of competence. They also need to be clear of any additional support which the learner may require so that they can provide appropriate support in the workplace.

Some employers, and providers, view initial assessment as a selection tool to recruit the most able applicant, rather than a process to identify the learning and support needs of those who have already been selected. It may be partly based on information gathered during the selection process or prior to it, such as that collected by the careers service.

Effective initial assessment helps employers by providing them with:

- Motivated learners who feel positive about achieving their training plan.
- A better understanding of the learning and support needs of each learner.
- More effective recruitment by the placement of learners in the vocational areas which best match their interests and abilities.
- Reductions in staff turnover and associated costs through improved learner retention rates.



Initial Assessment Methods

This section describes some of the different methods used by providers to undertake initial assessment with learners. Included in the appendices are some examples of providers successfully using different examples of these methods during their initial assessment process.

The methods fall into six groups:

- Appraisal of written information, such as learners' application forms, records of achievement, progress files and references.
- Individual interviews.
- Formal tests.
- Learner questionnaires.
- Observed group activities.
- Practical vocational activities.

Providers do not normally use all the methods but choose those which are appropriate to the needs and circumstances of their learners. Typically, providers choose a combination of methods to assess an individual, in order to gain an accurate, overall picture of their needs. Information collected through one method may well reinforce information collected through a different method. In some instances it may be contradictory and require use of additional methods. Figure 4.1 identifies which methods may be useful in collecting different information from the learner. Included in Section 10 are examples of providers using different methods

Equality of Opportunity

In choosing which methods to use providers must ensure equality of opportunity. There is justification for variety among methods in that what may be appropriate in one occupational area may not be in another. This should not result in learners in some occupational areas receiving a more thorough initial assessment than in others.

When using written tests, providers have to consider whether they are the best way of assessing the needs of all learners. Some learners may be unaccustomed to taking tests or do not enjoy the experience, which then effects their performance. Poor performance in these tests may also be due to poor literacy skills, or the fact that English is a second language, rather than the subject which is actually being assessed.

All assessment tests used should be valid, reliable and free from bias. For this reason providers should not develop their own 'home grown' tests unless they can guarantee all of these. Commercial tests should be checked to ensure that they provide evidence of their validity and reliability, and that the

language used does not discriminate against those from some cultural backgrounds. Many commercial tests can only be used by staff who have been accredited to deliver them. Further information on this can be found in Section 6 – Skills, Knowledge and Development of Staff.

Figure 4.1

Suggested Methods for Collecting Relevant Information from the Learner

	Application forms	NRA/Progress file	References	Interviews	Formal tests	Self assessment questionnaires	Observed group activities	Practical vocational activities
Career preferences and suitability	●			●	●			●
Qualifications and achievements	●	●	●	●				
Aptitude and potential		●	●	●	●		●	
Prior learning and experience	●	●	●	●		●		
Basic skills	●		●	●	●			
Key skills	●			●	●		●	
Learning difficulties	●	●	●	●			●	
Interests	●		●	●				
Learning style				●		●	●	
Job role				●		●		
Personal effectiveness			●	●			●	
Personal circumstances	●		●	●				

Application Forms

Application forms are completed prior to entry onto learning programmes and are often used for selection purposes at that stage. They contain information that can be used to determine the individual's learning plan and are therefore useful in initial assessment.

The application form includes:

- The courses the learner has studied and the qualifications that he or she has achieved. These may be helpful in selecting whether a pre-vocational, foundation or advanced apprenticeship or other type of learning programme is appropriate. Previous qualifications, such as a GCSE in mathematics or English language may give the learner exemption from part of the key skill requirements. Similarly a learner may have completed key skills as part of a GNVQ.
- Employment and work experience, which may include their current work. This information is useful in matching the learner to the appropriate occupational area and in deciding the level of the qualifications to target. It is also valuable in designing the on-the-job learning programme to avoid repetition of previous experience and to include work that fills gaps in the learner's experience.

- Career interests and aspirations. Learners would expect these to be reflected in their learning plans.
- Previous work-based learning. The learning plan should build on previous learning. If it is in a different occupational area there may be parts of that learning that are common and therefore do not need to be repeated. If other NVQ units have previously been completed it may be possible to accredit them formally through the accreditation of prior learning and experience process. If a learner left a previous learning programme early then there may be lessons to be learnt in designing the current learning programme. For example, was the learner not interested in that occupational area? Does the learner have learning difficulties or basic skill needs that prevented him or her making steady progress? Was the level of the training too high or too low? Does the learner have personal problems, which were an obstacle last time and may not be resolved? Does the learner lack employability skills, such as the ability to turn up on time? It is unlikely that these questions can be answered from the application form but the form may prompt these to be assessed further.

For learners with literacy difficulties, specific disabilities or where English is a second language, asking them to complete an application form may not prove beneficial. Suitable arrangements may need to be made for prospective learners where help can be provided.

Interviews

Interviews provide opportunity to discuss and gather information on:

- The accuracy of the information contained in the learner's application form.
- Learners' knowledge and understanding and suitability to undertake particular types of careers and jobs.
- Expected examination grades if these are unknown. This may help in the identification of the level of programme to be undertaken.
- The results of any formal 'tests' which have been undertaken prior to the interview such as psychometric tests or basic skills or key skills assessments.
- Learners' personal effectiveness. Where gaps are identified they need to be addressed within individual learning plans. Learners' experiences at school/college, home, work and through hobbies and interests, provide the focus for much of this discussion. For example, how well does the learner communicate – are they confident? How well motivated are they and what kind of situations do they best respond in? Have they attended school/college or work regularly? Are they neat and tidy in appearance? How well do they respond to authority? Do they enjoy working with others or do they prefer to be on their own? What is their attitude to members of the opposite sex, or members of different minority ethnic groups, or persons with disabilities?
- Any health problems which might effect the type of job which they do.
- Travel-to-work areas.

Interviewing young people or adults who have been long-term unemployed is a very skilled process. If providers and employers are to get the best out of learner interviews, which form an important part of the initial assessment process, they need to ensure that they have well-developed and effective processes in place, and staff who are competent at conducting interviews.

Records of Achievement and Progress File

Learner's Records of Achievement can be used to both support and verify information recorded in application forms and provided during interviews. Many providers ask learners to bring their Record of Achievement with them to their interview. They can provide a focus for discussion during interview and give the learner confidence in talking about themselves. They can include a range of information including achievements and qualifications, school reports, attendance records, work experience reports, extra-curricular activities, membership of clubs and sports teams.

The Department for Education and Employment has introduced the Progress File, which aims to build on the good practice from the current National Record of Achievement. Progress File is a set of materials which are designed to help young people and adults make the most of themselves and their opportunities. It consists of one or more workbooks. They provide individuals with a method of recognising, recording and evaluating their achievements: planning, learning and progressing; and presenting their achievements to others. Young people typically keep their workbook in a ring binder together with examples of their achievements, certificates, c.v.'s and action plans. As some of the workbooks are designed for use in schools, providers will find it helpful to review them in the same way in which they currently review the Records of Achievement where these are currently available. Providers may also find some of the activities described in the workbooks as a useful way of identifying learning and support requirements during the initial assessment process. One of the workbooks "**New Horizons**", is designed specifically for use by providers. For more information on where Progress File can be obtained see Section 8 – Sources of Useful Information.

References

Gathering information from other sources about a learner is useful. It can be used to verify or support the information which has been gathered during initial assessment. It may also provide another person's viewpoint which may be contrary to your own. This may indicate that further assessment is necessary. It may also identify areas which you have not considered and which may need to be included in the learning plan. Collecting information from other sources may also reduce the likelihood that the same information is repeatedly asked of learners.

Reference sources include schools, colleges, careers services, employers, voluntary or support groups, statutory agencies, clubs or societies associated with hobbies and interests.

Basic Skills Assessment

Basic skills are the ability to speak, read and write in English and to use mathematics at a level sufficient to function and progress at work and in society. Approximately seven million adults in England have difficulty with basic skills. Adults with poor basic skills are five times more likely to be unemployed or out of the labour market.

The initial assessment of basic skills is therefore crucial. Learners with a lack of basic skills are liable to make poor progress in their training and to have difficulty sustaining employment. Early and accurate assessment of their basic skills learning needs, followed by a learning plan to address those needs, can make a substantial difference to the learners.

Tests are available for use in the initial assessment of basic skills. Some of the more commonly used ones are listed in the Figure 4.2. The tests fall in to two categories:

- Initial screening.
- Diagnostic assessment.

Figure 4.2

Examples of Tools Used by Providers for the Initial Assessment of Basic Skills

Name of product	Supplier	What it assesses
Initial Assessment: An assessment test for Reading, Writing and Maths	Basic Skills Agency	Initial Assessment is an assessment test for basic skills in reading, writing and maths. Its purpose is to indicate that there may be a need for learning support in number, writing and reading and that further assessment is required.
BeST the Screening Toolkit for Basic Skills	BE Consultancy	BeST is a multimedia screening for the basic skills of reading, writing, oral communication and number. It includes 15 literacy and 15 numeracy tasks and is based upon the basic skills standards devised in the early 1990s which form the basis for the Wordpower and Numberpower accreditation schemes.
SKILLCHECK & CHECKERS	Associated Examining Board	SKILLCHECK is a one-hour assessment designed to assess basic skills in numeracy, graphical skills and literacy. CHECKERS assesses both basic literacy and numeracy skills at a lower level than SKILLCHECK. The numeracy section has 30 questions, which are divided into three repeated blocks of 10 skills. The literacy section has 20 questions with more important skills repeated at two or three levels.
Basic Skills Tests (BST)	NFER-NELSON	The basic skills tests provide a measure of basic literacy and numeracy skills. They are designed for use with young people and adults who have few or no academic qualifications. The numeracy test assesses the ability to carry out simple calculations, estimations and application of numerical concepts to everyday problems. The literacy test is based around a newspaper from an imaginary town.

Screening tests aim to identify those who may need support and to indicate an approximate level of their skills. Diagnostic tests aim to identify the specific nature of an individual's strengths and weaknesses and to clearly identify the learning needs. It is normal practice to screen learners first and then use the diagnostic tests where necessary.

It may be obvious from a learner's application form or from other initial assessment sources that a learner does not lack basic skills. Figure 4.3 shows the equivalence between basic skills levels and those of key skills and the national curriculum.

Figure 4.3

Comparison of Basic Skills Standards to Other National Qualifications and Standards

Basic Skills Standards	Key Skills	National Curriculum
Communication and Numeracy	Communication and Application of Number	English and Mathematics
Entry		Key Stage 1 Level 2 (Age 7)
Level 1	Level 1	Key Stage 2 Level 4 (Age 11)
Level 2	Level 2	Key Stage 3 - 4 GCSE A* - C (Age 16)

Some providers automatically screen all learners' basic skills. This has the advantage that learners feel they are being treated equally and that no learner slips through the net. The disadvantage is that learners who obviously have the basic skills can feel insulted, resent the waste of their time and gain the wrong impression about the level of attainment that they are expected to achieve in their subsequent learning.

Key Skills Initial Assessment

Key skills are generic skills which can help individuals to improve their own learning and performance in education and training, work and life in general. Key skills are linked to basic skills in that they require their application in a wide range of contexts and the ability to transfer skills learnt in one environment to other completely different environments. There are six key skills, performance in each of which is graded from level 1 to 4:

- Communication
- Application of Number
- Information Technology
- Improving own Learning and Performance
- Working with Others
- Problem Solving

Key skills are integral to all foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships. The required level of individual key skills is determined within each occupational framework by the relevant National Training Provider (NTO).

The learning programme determines the final minimum target for each learner. Initial assessment of learners' key skills on entry measures the distance each learner has to travel to reach that minimum target. Learners enter training with widely varying key skills. Accurate initial assessment of key skills can lead to substantially different individual learning plans. Some learners just meet the threshold of basic skills. Others may already exceed the minimum level they need to achieve by the end. In the latter case, learners probably still need to learn to apply their existing key skills in the workplace. The amount of planned off-the-job training in key skills would be expected to be quite different in these two extreme cases.

Initial assessment of key skills should also determine the level of key skills an individual learner is capable of achieving during the learning programme. If a learner is capable of achieving one or more key skills at a higher level than the minimum laid down in the framework then he or she should be helped to achieve that potential. Too often learners regard key skills as a waste of time because they are not learning anything new.

An assessment of a learner's existing level of key skills may be possible from other initial assessment methods such as by looking at the application form. Figure 4.4 lists some of the tools available for the initial assessment of key skills.

Figure 4.4

Examples of Tools Used by Providers for the Initial Assessment of Key Skills

Name of product	Supplier	What does it do?
keySKILLBUILDER	West Nottinghamshire College	"keySKILLBUILDER" is available as either a paper-based product or on CD-ROM. It provides a series of initial assessments for learners at levels 1, 2 and 3 for communication and application of number. The results from completed assessments are plotted on a results sheet which provides a detailed analysis of strengths and weaknesses. A series of 22 workbooks are available to support learners with their individual needs.
Diagnostic Assessment for Key Skills	Colchester Institute	"Diagnostic Assessment for Key Skills" is a computer based diagnostic tool which has been developed to provide a guideline to a candidate's current level of key skills in application of number and communication. The communication section contains 50 questions covering comprehension, spelling, punctuation and grammar. There is also a 'free writing' section to highlight problems such as dyslexia. The application of number section has 35 questions divided into three sections, which assess topics such as averages, formulae, probability and percentages. The assessment lasts approximately one hour. On completion of the assessment a printed profile is generated which indicates areas of weakness.
Searchlight	SHL Ltd	"Searchlight" is a computer-based package designed to profile ability and predict how an individual will cope with the key skill requirements of a course. It assesses the abilities or thinking skills seen as essential to the acquisition of the application of key skills in application of number, communication and IT. These abilities are mapped onto the revised (2000) key skills specifications. Any combination of key skills and level can be assessed in one session.

Psychometric Tests

Psychometric tests are widely used in giving guidance on careers and in the selection of staff by employers. They are not used in isolation, but as one source of information alongside others, such as interviews. They can form a useful basis for discussion about a person's career or about his or her suitability for a job.

Figure 4.5

Examples of Psychometric Assessment Tests Used by Providers

Product	Supplier	What it assesses/measures
XTEND GeneSys	Psytech International	GeneSys is designed to support providers in placing learners in an area that is most suitable for them. It consists of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● An Occupational Interest Profile ● Numerical reasoning test ● Verbal reasoning test ● Abstract reasoning test
FEATS Future Education and Training Series	NFER-Nelson	FEATS is designed to help young people make the right educational and training decisions based on their personal ability, interests, preferred learning style and motivation. It comprises 12 sub-tests divided into four modules: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Module 1- assesses reading skills, verbal ability, number skills, numerical ability and writing skills ● Module 2 – assesses non-verbal and spatial ability with checking and accuracy ● Module 3 – identifies personal skills, learning preferences and motivation ● Module 4 – a vocational guidance questionnaire which looks at the sort of jobs and activities in which a candidate might be interested
AIMS portfolio	SHL	The AIMS portfolio is designed to facilitate career decision making. It includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A general abilities profile (GAP) which consists of an integrated set of 12 ability tests, arranged at three educational levels. Candidates take a core skills module (verbal, numerical and diagrammatic reasoning) and a specific skills module (checking, spatial and mechanical) ● A general occupational interest inventory (GOII) ● A motivation questionnaire (MQ) ● An occupational personality questionnaire (OPQ)
Technical Test Battery (TTB)	SHL	A battery of tests suitable for the selection of craft and technical apprentices. The battery includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Verbal comprehension ● Numerical computation ● Visual estimation ● Mechanical comprehension ● Technical understanding ● Numerical reasoning ● Fault diagnosis ● Spatial recognition
Differential Aptitude Test Battery (DAT)	The Psychological Corporation	The Differential Aptitude Test battery assesses the seven primary abilities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Verbal reasoning ● Numerical ability ● Abstract reasoning ● Clerical speed and accuracy ● Mechanical reasoning ● Spatial reasoning ● Language usage and spelling <p>The results from the assessments can be combined with interest data to form a basis for vocational guidance.</p>

Psychometric testing is a very specialised process. The tests have been designed to provide objective measurements of people's psychological characteristics, such as their aptitude, their reasoning ability, their behaviour and their motivation. As they are objective they can avoid problems of bias associated with more subjective techniques such as interviews. They can also provide evidence of potential where someone has no formal educational qualifications.

Research has shown that evidence of academic ability, such as GCSE passes, is not always a good indicator of assessing potential success in vocational learning programmes. Some providers therefore use them to determine whether an individual has the potential to successfully complete an advanced modern apprenticeship programme, for example. Tests are carried out by trained specialists who know how to conduct the tests under controlled conditions and who know how to interpret the results of the tests.

Providers can usefully use psychometric testing of learners to help them decide on an occupational area or a career, and therefore help them to decide on the most appropriate learning programme. Those providers who select learners may use psychometric testing as one part of the selection process, in order to choose the learners who are best able to benefit from the training. Employers may make use of psychometric test results in selecting a learner, in the same way as they would for any other employee.

The impact of psychometric testing on an individual's learning plan is more likely to be in the choice of occupational area, and the level of programme, than in the structure of the learning plan itself. Figure 4.5 contains examples of psychometric tests used by some providers.

Learning Styles Assessment

Assessing learners' learning styles is important in ensuring that they learn quickly and efficiently during their learning programme. Individuals learn best in a variety of different ways and have preferences for certain ways of learning. Some, for example, learn best by doing things as opposed to thinking about them. Others prefer to learn by listening and sharing ideas with others. Some prefer very structured activities whilst others enjoy reading and examining information carefully. Trainers need to be aware of the ways in which learners learn most effectively in order that they can plan training and learning opportunities which best meet their needs. Training styles are often influenced by the trainer's own preferred learning style. Learners are at risk of their training being ineffective, where the trainer's dominant teaching style is in conflict with their own preferred learning style.

Some providers use individual interviews or group discussions with learners to identify their preferred learning styles. Others use learning style assessment tools, some examples of which, are identified in Figure 4.6.

Learner Questionnaires

Learner questionnaires are often used to help learners identify their own strengths and weaknesses and assess their own learning and support needs. The results contribute, along with other sources of information, to the individual learning plan.

The questionnaires usually adopt a fairly simple approach. They typically ask the learner to assess themselves against a number of criteria. For example, they might be asked to tick which of the following activities they have done before. Or, on a scale of 1 to 4, indicate how good they are at working in a team with other people.

Figure 4.6

Examples of Learning Styles Assessment Tools

Name of product	Author	What does it do?
Learning Styles Questionnaire	Honey and Mumford	The questionnaire allows investigation of learning styles based on the learning process. Four types of learning styles are identified: Activists, Reflectors, Theorists and Pragmatists. The questionnaire has been designed for use with 16-19 year olds and takes approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Respondents answer 40 questions in terms of whether they agree more than disagree with them.
The Learning Styles Interactive Diagnostic Screening Test	Ross Cooper	This is a computer based tool which investigates learning styles based on cognitive skills and instructional preference. Consideration is given as to whether people prefer to think visually or verbally and whether they prefer to process information holistically or sequentially.

Questionnaires can be designed to collect information on almost any aspect of a learner's experience. This may include, for example, a self-assessment of their perceived skills and performance in their current job if they are already employed. The outcomes are based on the learners' perception of themselves which may not always be accurate. They are however an effective way of involving the learner in the identification of their own strengths, weaknesses and learning needs. Information gathered in this way can be built upon using other initial assessment methods, such as an interview or formal assessment tests.

Group Activities

Some providers observe a learner engaging in group activities with other learners to measure specific attributes and to identify personal strengths and weaknesses, for example, during their induction programmes. Some employers also observe learners in group activities as part of their selection process. Attributes measured in this way include the ability to work with others, communication, confidence, motivation, decision-making and problem solving.

To be successful, group activities rely on having a number of observers who are properly trained and have clearly defined criteria on which to base their judgements. The outcomes of group activities can be a useful source in supporting or confirming information collected through other methods. The information may result in additions to an individual's learning plan to increase, for example, his or her self-confidence.

Practical Vocational Activities

It is often not until the learner actually experiences a job at first hand that they know whether they like it or not. One of the reasons why many young people drop out of their learning programmes is because the occupational area in which they are placed does not match their expectation. Exposure to a 'real job' is important in helping individuals to find the right occupational area.

Some providers offer work 'tasters' or 'trials'. These allow the learner to experience at first hand a number of different occupations and helps them decide which most suits them. It also provides the opportunity for both the provider and the employer to assess the learner's vocational skills and suitability for the job as well as his or her learning and support needs.

In some instances it may be necessary to consider whether the prospective learner has the physical skills to cope with the particular demands of the occupation which they are seeking to enter. Some occupations require a high level of dexterity, such as hairdressing or assembly operations, and these can be assessed during initial assessment. Providers or employers give learners specific practical tasks in order to make the judgement. Practical assessments can be designed to assess a wide range of vocational skills.

Summarising the Outcomes of Initial Assessment

The initial assessment process involves the collection of a substantial amount of information about each individual, using a range of different methods and with often more than one member of staff involved. It is essential that the information is brought together to form a picture of the whole person.

Information should be brought together on:

- Career preferences and suitability. This should include the results of any vocational assessment activities including vocational interest inventories, work 'trials' or 'tasters', dexterity tests to support the choice of occupational area and job.
- Achievements and qualifications.
- Aptitude and potential.
- Prior learning and experience including any work-based learning previously undertaken, current occupational skills, key skill units undertaken.
- Any basic skills assessments and their results.
- Any key skills assessments and their results.
- Any learning difficulties identified.
- Interests of the learner which may influence career choice or design of training programme.
- Learning style.
- Job role.
- Personal effectiveness and areas which need to be addressed.
- Any personal circumstances which may effect learning.

All members of staff involved in collecting the information should jointly agree the learner's learning and support needs from the information which is available. This information should be used to set learning goals and used to develop each individual's learning plan.

An example of a format for summarising the outcomes of initial assessment for each learner is included in Section 11.



Planning Training and Learning

Planning Training

All training should be planned to meet the needs of learners identified during initial assessment, and the objectives of the learning programme, such as a foundation apprenticeship in retail. If training is not planned, opportunities for the learner to learn are missed. They may get fed up and leave their learning programme or take longer than necessary to achieve their objectives and qualifications.

When planning training consideration needs to be given to:

- **Where** the training will be implemented and the learning undertaken?
- **How** the training will be implemented?
- **Who** will implement the training with learners?
- **When** will the training take place?
- **How** will the learner's progress be measured and reviewed?

Locations

Learning normally takes place whilst the learner is undertaking their job ('on-the-job training') and away from the job through planned training activities ('off-the-job training'). On-the-job training takes place in the workplace on employers premises whilst off-the-job training may take place in either the workplace, or at the premises of a training provider or other training establishment. For learners who are not yet ready to enter the workplace all of their learning is likely to take place 'off-the-job'.

Techniques

There are a wide variety of techniques which can be used to train. Their appropriateness is often determined by the location in which they are used, and the learning style of the learner. On-the-job techniques include demonstration, coaching, job rotation or planned experience and mentoring. Off-the-job techniques include lectures, discussions, group exercises, case studies, role-plays, simulation, workshops, distance learning and outdoor learning. Techniques for use in either situation will include instruction, question and answer, assignments, projects, guided reading, computer based training, video and interactive video.

Trainers

On-the-job training is provided by staff within the workplace and involves the learner's supervisor. It may also involve colleagues who are assigned as mentors to guide and advise learners. Off-the-job training is provided by staff from training providers or other training establishments responsible for providing specific aspects of training. Where off-the-job training activities take place within the workplace this may also involve employers' staff.

Timing

Certain training activities such as workshops, lectures, group activities or job rotation, take place at scheduled times and are agreed with the learner. Activities such as coaching and mentoring take place on a continuous basis and are less clearly defined in terms of timing, apart from when specific meetings take place. Demonstration activities should be scheduled in advance where possible but should not prevent learning opportunities which occur naturally within the workplace being seized upon when they arise. Where learners undertake training activities in their own time without supervision, for example guided reading, they need to be prepared for this.

Progress measurement and review

When training is planned consideration needs to be given to how often the learner's progress will be reviewed and how it will be measured. Dates of progress review meetings should be scheduled within the plan. Progress measurement includes the measurement of occupational competence and competence in key skills. Assessment dates should therefore be included in plans. Mechanisms for measuring performance in other areas where needs have been identified such as attending work on time or developing confidence, should be developed as the plan is being drawn up.

Learning Plans

Learning plans should be used to show how the identified needs of learners and the objectives of their learning programme will be met. They clearly define the where, the how, the who and the when identified in the above section. There are a number of different types of learning plans currently used by training providers which provide the basis for the implementation of training:

- **An individual learning plan** – this is a plan which is prepared for the learner to show the training and support that they require and will receive, to help them achieve their objectives and fulfil their learning programme. It is a plan which continually evolves as new learning needs emerge or when feedback indicates that changes are required.
- **On-the-job learning plans** – these plans, prepared by employers often with the help of training providers, show specific tasks or activities being undertaken in the workplace in order to allow the learner or groups of learners to develop competence in areas required. They should form part of an individual's learning plan.
- **Off-the-job learning plans** – these are similar to on-the-job training plans, except that they show planned off-the-job training activities over a period of time for learners or groups of learners. They are distinct from training session plans which detail planned activities for individual training sessions. These should also form part of an individual's learning plan and be prepared by training provider staff.

Individual learning plans

Each learner should have an individually designed learning plan which shows the training and support which they will receive to help them fulfil their learning programme. This is essential as each learner has a different starting position identified by initial assessment. Each learner is in a different learning environment in the workplace. Each learner has different potential that may allow them to develop at a faster pace and achieve additional learning or qualifications beyond the minimum requirements of the learning programme. It is critical that the learner is involved in the preparation of their learning plan so that they can take ownership of this.

Individual learning plans should include all of the following:

- **Information about the learner and their learning programme** - this includes learner's name, name of training provider, learning programme such as foundation modern apprenticeship, objectives in terms of qualifications, start date and target completion date of the whole programme. These may change during the period of the learning programme. Changes normally have to be agreed with the funding bodies. This part of the plan lends itself to a standardised form and is normally specified by the funding body.
- **Results of initial assessment and any accredited prior learning** - the results of the initial assessment and any accredited prior learning should be recorded as part of the individual learning plan. This provides a baseline to measure progress and is useful during the review process.
- **Induction training** - learners' inductions should be planned as with any other part of their training. They normally include both a work-place induction and an induction to the learning programme. Both should be shown within the learning plan. Induction training should provide learners with basic information about their learning programme, the job which they are going to be doing, and the environment in which they are based.
- **On-the-job training** - the plan should identify the learning opportunities that the learner will be given in the workplace to help them develop the skills and knowledge and required levels of competence demanded by their learning programme. This may be contained in a separate plan which forms part of the individual's overall learning plan.
- **Off-the-job training** - off-the-job training activities should be identified within the plan which complement learning in the workplace and address identified learning and support needs. As for on-the-job training, this may be contained in a separate plan which forms part of the individual's overall learning plan.
- **Progress review arrangements** - the learning plan should include an outline schedule of regular progress review meetings.
- **Assessment arrangements** - the learning plan should identify planned assessment and examination dates for qualifications being undertaken. It should also show how progress in other areas is measured.
- **Additional support arrangements** - the plan should describe how the learner is supported throughout training. It should also show how the additional support needs identified during initial assessment will be met.
- **Learners comments** - the learner should have the opportunity to comment on the plan, show that they have been involved in its preparation and understand the training that is required.

The individual learning plan may be a single document or it may consist of several documents covering each of the above sections. Where a series of documents are used it is important that they are linked together to present an integrated and coherent plan for the learner.

An effective learning plan is used as a working document to which the learner, the workplace supervisor and the trainer regularly refer. It is reviewed and revised to reflect the learner's growing capability and changing learning needs. It is likely that a learning plan is fairly detailed in the short term, for example for the next three to six months, and more of an outline for the longer term. The employer, the learner and the trainer are all involved in producing the plan. The training is thought through in advance in

enough detail that the learner, the employer and the trainers all know how the objectives will be achieved. Targets are set for the achievement dates of the objectives and the milestones towards these.

Although each learning plan is designed for the individual learner, it may be composed of units or blocks of training that are common to a group of learners or which are standard for all learners working towards a particular qualification throughout the country. In these cases it makes sense for the individual's learning plan to simply refer to a separate off-the-job learning plan rather than to reproduce it. Alternatively, a copy of the off-the-job learning plan could be attached to each individual learning plan. In many instances the result is a learning plan common to several learners but with minor "customised" elements to reflect the particular training and support needs, or the prior experience, of the individual.

Many learning plans are ineffective. They are often designed principally as a document for the purpose of providing an audit trail for the funding and not as a useful plan for the learner. They only list qualifications and units of qualifications, rather than training. They list nominal completion dates of qualifications or units, rather than the actual dates of training. They are not based on the results of the initial assessment of the individual's learning needs. Often they contain no reference to plans for on-the-job training and only limited information about off-the-job training. They are not usually revised as a result of discussions at the learner's progress review meetings.

On-the-job learning plans

On-the-job learning plans detail the learning opportunities or activities that the learner will be provided with in the workplace so that they can develop the required levels of competence to gain their qualifications and fulfil their learning programme. This includes the appropriate training techniques to be used to aid learning. Plans should also identify the additional support which the learner needs from the employer.

During initial assessment consideration will have been given to the extent to which the learner's job matches the requirements of the NVQ and key skills which they will be undertaking along with any other requirements of their learning programme. If the learner is required to develop competence in areas additional to those their current job allows, opportunities need to be planned for the learner to gain the necessary experience. This may involve internal job rotation or spending periods of time with other employers. Consideration will also have been given during initial assessment to the learner's existing occupational skills, knowledge and experience. Learners who have existing skills and competence may not require such an intensive plan as those who have no previous experience, and are likely to complete their learning programme in a shorter period of time.

On-the-job learning plans need to be sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of both the learner and the workplace. The tasks which the learner undertakes as part of their job are likely to be determined by the availability and flow of work. If work plans alter, this may necessitate changes to the on-the-job learning plan. Similarly new or other jobs in progress may present opportunities to develop competence in other areas which are relevant to the learning programme.

In order for on-the-job training to be effective it should be structured where possible to show progression from simple to more complex tasks. In this way the learner gains confidence as their experience increases.

Workplace supervisors and managers are best placed to draw up on-the-job learning plans as they are familiar with the work being undertaken and are responsible for the implementation of on-the-job training. Employers therefore need to understand the requirements of those qualifications being undertaken by learners. Some employers, particularly small employers, may need training providers to support them in this process. It is critical that training providers understand the content of on-the-job learning plans so that they can devise complementary off-the-job learning plans. Learners should be involved in the development of their on-the-job learning plan and understand its purpose.

Where learners are undertaking work experience as part of pre-vocational learning programmes they should still have on-the-job learning plans which show the learning opportunities that they will receive to meet their objectives.

The format in which the plan is written does not matter as long as it is available to the learner and the workplace supervisor to refer to regularly. For example it could be a chart on the wall in the workplace which is simply amended when needed. If an employer thinks that they have to rewrite the plan every time a change is needed it will soon cease to be a working document. A simple working plan is much better than a sophisticated plan that is not used.

Included in Section 12 are two examples (examples 1 and 2) of on-the-job learning plans. Example 1 is for an individual learner undertaking an NVQ level 2 in hairdressing with no previous experience. The plan shows the tasks which the learner performs over a period of time, which are relevant to their NVQ, and also demonstrates the idea of progression. Example 2 is an on-the-job learning plan for a group of learners. The plan shows how a group of learners are rotated within different sections of the company in order to gain the necessary level of experience.

Off-the-job learning plans

Off-the-job learning plans identify the training that is necessary for the learner to support their learning in the workplace. Typically off-the-job training focuses on providing the necessary underpinning knowledge to support the NVQ and key skills which are being undertaken. It also provides an opportunity for learners to learn how to cope with situations that occur infrequently in the workplace such as emergencies. For those learners following pre-vocational learning programmes, off-the-job training provides the necessary training to fulfil the objectives of their learning programme.

Off-the-job learning plans should provide details of the objectives of off-the-job training activities, the part of the learning programme to which it relates, the training techniques to be used, where training is to take place, who is delivering it, the times and dates. Workshop-type activities should be supported by detailed individual training session plans. Training records are kept of the off-the-job training sessions that learners have attended.

The requirement for off-the-job training depends upon the learner's skills, knowledge, level of competence and the job which they are undertaking. It will have been first identified during initial assessment but constantly evolves as the learner progresses within their job. They need therefore to be flexible documents.

Training providers are responsible for drawing up off-the-job learning plans. Wherever possible they should design them in conjunction with on-the-job learning plans. The benefit of this is that the training undertaken in each location complements each other. Training providers therefore first need to undertake discussions with employers. Learners also should be involved in the preparation of off-the-job learning plans and understand their purpose. Off-the-job learning plans should be available to all three parties.

Included in Section 12 (example 3) is an off-the-job learning plan for a group of learners. The plan identifies which learners need to attend specific sessions in order to gain relevant underpinning knowledge and are based on the results of initial assessment.

Co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training

If they are to get the most benefit from their training, learners need to have the opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills they have developed through off-the-job training in the workplace. Workplace supervisors need to understand what is being covered during off-the-job training and be kept up-to-date with changes to the plan. This enables them to help the learner put the off-the-job training into practice as opportunities arise in the workplace.

It is equally important that the training provider knows what a learner is learning during on-the-job training so that off-the-job training can be planned to suit the learner's needs. Off-the-job trainers should take every opportunity to draw on the learners' own workplace experience to create the links to on-the-job training. This may include off-the-job trainers drawing on workplace examples, training structured around jobs in progress at that time, or learners given assignments to do in the workplace.

Co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training rarely happens naturally. If it is to be effective it must be actively planned and managed throughout. It relies on close collaboration between training providers and employers.

Included in Section 12 are two examples (examples 4 and 5) of methods to ensure co-ordination. Example 4 illustrates the split between on- and off-the-job training activities and the specific responsibilities of both employers and providers. Example 5 links the relevant off-the-job training activities with the on-the-job training activities to achieve identified learning objectives.

The Review Process

The learner's progress review is the main method of monitoring progress towards achieving the objectives set out in their individual learning plan. It is also a means of identifying additional learning and support needs, resolving problems facing the learner and setting new targets for the learner to achieve. It is the primary means of managing the learner's whole learning programme.

The learning plan may need to be amended during the progress review. Effective learning plans are living, working documents that are regularly used by training providers, employers and learners. Certain elements of all plans are likely to need regular updating as targets are achieved and new targets are set.

Each learner's progress should be reviewed at least once every three months as a minimum. The frequency should be increased to meet the needs of the learner at particular points in the programme, such as at the beginning, near the end or if a learner has a particular problem or if additional learning needs are identified. For learner's following pre-vocational learning programmes their progress may need to be reviewed on a weekly basis.

The purpose of reviews is to consider progress in both on- and off-the job training compared with the plan. It checks the outcomes of planned assessments, any problems or unresolved issues facing the learner and that there are no obstacles towards completing their learning programme. The outcome of the review may influence future on- and off-the-job training requirements and the timing of future assessments, in which case it results in changes to the individual learning plans. It may be useful therefore to keep records of learner reviews with their individual learning plan.

Reviews should involve learners, training providers and employers. The benefit of involving employers is that they will be better able to understand the needs of the learner, to arrange on-the-job training and agree the need for off-the-job training.



Skills, Knowledge and Development of Staff

Skills and Knowledge

Effective practice in initial assessment and the design and production of individual's learning plans relies on the provider having skilled and competent staff. Staff involved in these activities should have a wide range of skills and knowledge.

Initial assessment

Those staff undertaking initial assessment should have knowledge and understanding of:

- The purpose of initial assessment.
- Methods of identifying learning and support needs and collecting information.
- What learning programmes are available within their own organisation.
- The requirements of specific learning programmes and occupational frameworks.
- Other providers in the market who may be better placed to meet learners' needs.
- The requirements of employers.
- Processes and procedures for the accreditation of prior experience and learning.
- Initial assessment tools including basic skills, key skills and psychometric tests where appropriate.
- When additional specialist assessment may be required, for example diagnosing dyslexia or more severe learning difficulties.
- Interviewing and questioning techniques.
- How to put learners at ease.
- Positive feedback techniques.
- Methods of analysing and recording collected information.
- Different learning styles and ways of learning.
- Equal opportunities and non-discriminatory practices.
- Procedures for initial assessment including the handling of confidential information.

The type of skills required by staff undertaking initial assessment includes:

- Active listening, clarifying and summarising.
- Information gathering.
- Effective feedback.
- Analytical skills.
- Negotiation.
- Decision making.
- Sound objectivity and judgement.
- Written communication.

Individual learning plans

Those staff involved in designing individual learning plans need to have knowledge and understanding of:

- The requirements of specific learning programmes and occupational frameworks.
- Methods of designing and delivering learning programmes to meet learners needs.
- Training techniques.
- The outcomes of the initial assessment process.
- Learning opportunities within the workplace.
- How to integrate on- and off-the-job learning opportunities to create a coherent learning plan.
- Methods of monitoring and reviewing learner progress.
- Available resources.
- Recording and documentation procedures.
- Issues of equality of opportunity and non-discriminatory practice.

The type of skills required by staff designing individual learning plans includes:

- Verbal communication.
- Written communication.
- Planning and design.
- Creativity.
- Decision making.

Qualifications Available

Standards based

The “**National Standards for Training and Development**” produced by the Employment NTO (ENTO), and the “**Standards for Teaching and Supporting Learning**” produced by the Further Education NTO (FENTO) provide appropriate frameworks for the development of staff engaged in these activities:

Initial Assessment

ENTO - Unit A21 – Identify individual’s learning aims, needs and styles.

ENTO - Unit A22 – Identify individual learner needs.

FENTO - Unit A1 – Identify and plan for the needs of potential learners.

FENTO - Unit A2 – Make an initial assessment of learners’ needs.

Pitman Qualifications have introduced a Diagnostic Profiling Award for staff involved in initial assessment. This consists of the two units A21 and C22 from the ENTO National Standards for Training and Development.

Individual Learning Plans

ENTO - Unit B21 – Design and learning programmes to meet learner’s requirements.

ENTO - Unit C22 – Agree learning programmes with learners.

Accreditation of prior learning and experience

ENTO - Unit D36 - Advise and support candidates to identify prior achievement.

Psychometric test users

The British Psychological Society has competence standards for psychometric test users. Publishers of tests normally only sell their materials to providers that can demonstrate that they meet these standards. Those wishing to use aptitude and ability tests require a Certificate of Competence Level A and those wishing to use personality tests require a Certificate of Competence Level B. In some instances publishers also require proposed test users to attend additional training for specific products. Further information on training courses for test users is available from the British Psychological Society and publishers of tests – see Section 8 – Sources of Useful Information.

Managing and Quality Assuring Initial Assessment and Individual Learning Plans

Like all key stages in the learning process, both initial assessment and the development of individual learning plans needs to be both managed and quality assured. TSC reports identify weaknesses for many providers in the generic areas of management of training and quality assurance. During the year 1999 – 2000, nearly one third of providers were awarded unsatisfactory grades for management of training and nearly one half for quality assurance.

Written Policies and Procedures

Many providers' staff are involved in initial assessment and the design of individual learning plans. It is very important that they all have a common and shared understanding of purpose. One way of helping with this is for the provider to have a clear written policy. An example of this is shown on page 35.

The policy should be supported by a number of procedures which define exactly how it is implemented. These should include how information is collected, analysed and recorded for each learner during initial assessment and how the information is used to design individual learning plans. The procedures should be audited at regular intervals to check compliance by staff.

Feedback systems should gather views from learners about their experience of the initial assessment process and the appropriateness of their individual learning plan. Any adverse comments should be acted upon.

Communication

Communication is vital throughout the initial assessment process not just between the member of staff undertaking initial assessment or designing the individual learning plan with the learner, but all those members of staff involved in the process. Within providers, some staff may have responsibilities for recruitment, or differing parts of the initial assessment process whilst others may have separate responsibilities for designing individual learning plans. It is vital that all parties work together to share and agree their findings and make decisions. Without a high degree of communication important information may well be lost or interpreted incorrectly, which subsequently results in an inaccurate or inappropriate learning plan.

Effective external communication is equally important, such as with employers. They need to be involved in the design of individual learning plans where learners are employed or undertaking work experience. It also includes communication with other providers which have undertaken assessment activities previously, such as careers services or other providers which the learner has previously attended. It will involve gathering information from other external providers which can contribute to the process of building up a coherent picture of the learning and support needs of each individual, for example schools, previous employers or support agencies.

Staff responsibilities and development

It is important that those staff who carry out initial assessment and design individual learning plans are competent and provided with proper levels of support, advice and training. A senior member of staff should be defined as having overall responsibility for initial assessment and the production of learning plans and provide a point of contact for those staff requiring help and advice. He or she should keep themselves regularly updated on developments in initial assessment and learning plans, new methods of assessment and good practice. Further information on the levels of knowledge and skills required by staff undertaking initial assessment and developing learning plans can be found in Section 6.

Data collection and analysis

Poor initial assessment practice can be a contributory factor where learners leave programmes prior to completion. Information on the reasons for early leaving should be collected at regular intervals and analysed. The analysis should ascertain whether learners have left because they were placed in an inappropriate occupational area or the occupational framework was too difficult for the job which they were doing. These may point to poor initial assessment.

The methods used during initial assessment to gather information from learners need to be constantly evaluated. If they are not effective at identifying learners' needs, or do not measure what they are intended to measure, then they should not be used. Often it becomes apparent in the early stages of an individual's learning programme how accurate particular initial assessment methods were. Assessment methods should be evaluated at regular intervals to ensure that they are fair to all learners, regardless of race, gender and disability.

The learning and support needs of all learners should be aggregated and analysed to identify where resources need to be effectively targeted within the provider. This will assist with the design and planning of the learning provision.

Initial Assessment Policy

EXAMPLE

We at xxxx Training Services aim to accurately identify what each learner needs to learn and be aware of any support requirements that he or she may have. The purpose is to enable us to design a learning plan that reflects the learner's specific needs and which ensures that each learner gets the most out of his or her learning programme.

When identifying what learners needs to learn we consider:

- Their career aspirations and their relevant abilities, interests and skills.
- The most appropriate learning programme for them to follow.
- What they have already learnt and know.

The initial assessment process gathers information on each learner's career aspirations and suitability, their qualifications and achievements, aptitude and potential, prior learning and experience, basic skill and key skills learning needs, any learning difficulties, interests, learning style, job role, personal effectiveness and personal circumstances which may effect learning. Our strategy is that:

1. Learners are fully involved in the initial assessment process.
2. Learners understand the benefits of what they are being asked to do and how the information is used.
3. Recommendations on how learning requirements will be met are agreed.
4. Constructive feedback is given in a positive and encouraging way.
5. Learners' views are collected on the initial assessment process.
6. Initial assessment methods are appropriate.
7. The purpose of each method is explained to the learner.
8. Assessment methods are monitored to ensure that that they are effective and that they do not discriminate against certain groups of learners.
9. Outcomes of initial assessment are recorded on an individual summary record and used when designing the learning plan.

The following procedures support the implementation of this policy:

Initial assessment (Procedure 5), Learner feedback (Procedure 18) and Designing individual learning plans (Procedure 8)

Sources of Useful Information

Basic Skills

Basic Skills Tests	NFER-NELSON Tel: 01753 858 961
Skillcheck & Checkers	Associated Examining Board Tel: 01483 506 506
BeST the Screening Toolkit for Basic Skills	Be Consultancy Tel: 01691 624 634
Initial Assessment: An assessment test for reading, writing and maths	Basic Skills Agency Tel: 0207 405 4017

Key Skills

keySKILLBUILDER	West Nottinghamshire College Tel: 01623 627 191
Diagnostic Assessment for Key Skills	Colchester Institute Tel: 01206 518 000
Searchlight	SHL Tel: 0208 335 8000

Psychometric Tests

XTEND GeneSys	Psytech International Tel: 01452 482 833
FEATS	NFER-NELSON Tel: 01753 858 961
AIMS	SHL Tel: 0208 335 8000
Technical Test Battery	SHL Tel: 0208 335 8000

Differential Aptitude Test Battery

The Psychological Corporation
Tel: 020 7424 4456

Psychological Testing: A User's Guide

The British Psychological Society
Tel: 0116 254 9568

Learning Styles

Learning Styles Questionnaire

Honey & Mumford
Tel: 01628 633 946

The Learning Styles Interactive Diagnostic Screening Test

Ross Cooper
Tel: 0171 700 8680

Initial Assessment

Diagnostic Profiling: A support pack for the initial assessment of learners (Ref: DPR)

DfEE Publications
Tel: 0845 602 2260

Guidance on Assessment in The Learning Gateway

DfEE
Contact: John Harradence
Fax: 0114 259 3371

Initial Assessment to Identify Learning Needs

FEDA publications
Tel: 01761 462 503

General

Guidance on the Quality Assurance of Training

QSI Consultants
Tel: 01925 730 963

Developing Good Practice in the Management of Training

QSI Consultants
Tel: 01925 730 963

Developing Good Practice and Guidance in the training process

QSI Consultants
Tel: 01925 730 963

Developing Good Practice and Guidance in working with employers

QSI Consultants
Tel: 01925 730 963

Reaching New Standards: Annual Report of the Chief Inspector

Training Standards Council
Tel: 01865 788 700

Assessment Matters: The National Journal of Vocational assessment

Lifetime Careers
Tel: 01793 549 200

Progress File publications

DfEE
Tel: 0845 602 2260

Guidelines For Testing People With Disabilities

SHL
Tel: 0208 335 8000

Equal Opportunities Guidelines for Best Test Practice in
the Use of Personnel Selection Tests

SHL
Tel: 0208 335 8000

Employment NTO (ENTO)

ENTO
Tel: 0116 251 7979

Further Education NTO (FENTO)

FENTO
Tel: 0207 827 4666

Web Sites

Basic Skills Agency

www.basic-skills.co.uk

Adult Learning Inspectorate

www.ali.gov.uk

Training Standards Council

www.tsc.gov.uk

Progress File

www.dfes.gov.uk/progfile/

Learning Skills Development Agency (formerly FEDA)

www.feda.ac.uk

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA)

www.qca.org.uk

Key Skills

www.keyskillssupport.net



Self-assessment Checklist

Use the following checklist to assess how well you carry out initial assessment and produce individual learning plans.

1. INITIAL ASSESSMENT

- What information do you collect about each learner's:
 - Career preferences and suitability?
 - Qualifications and achievements?
 - Aptitude and potential?
 - Prior learning and experience?
 - Basic skill needs?
 - Key skills needs?
 - Learning difficulties?
 - Interests?
 - Learning style?
 - Job role?
 - Personal effectiveness?
 - Personal circumstances which may effect learning?
- Which methods do you use to collect the information and how do you decide which you should use?
- Do the methods provide a clear picture of the learning and support needs of each learner?
- How do you evaluate the effectiveness of the tools you use?
- Do you undertake diagnostic assessment of those learners who are found to need support with basic skills or where key skills are a requirement of the learning programme?
- How do you ensure that learners work in occupational areas which are suited to their needs, abilities and aptitudes?
- How do you ensure that learners are on programmes which are most suited to them and their employer, and are set at the right level?
- How do you accredit prior learning and experience?
- How do you actively involve learners and employers in the initial assessment process?
- What information about the learner do you seek to gather from external sources?

2. INDIVIDUAL LEARNING PLANS

- Are individuals' learning plans based on the outcomes of their initial assessment?
- Are learning goals clearly identified for each learner in his or her individual learning plan?
- Is the learning programme which each learner will follow identified?
- Is on-the-job training planned in detail in the short term, and in outline beyond that?
- Does on-the-job training show breadth of training by working in as wide a range of appropriate tasks as possible?
- Has off-the-job occupational training been planned and is it linked to the on-the-job training where appropriate?
- Have the learner and the employer been fully involved in drawing up the plan?
- Is basic skills training planned, and does it meet the needs which were identified at initial assessment?
- Has key skills training been planned and is it linked to the on-the-job training?
- Are any additional support arrangements identified?
- Does the plan include review arrangements?
- Is the plan easy to update and amend?
- Is the plan designed in such a way that it becomes a living document?

3. LEARNER INVOLVEMENT

- Is the purpose of initial assessment explained to the learner and understood?
- Are the methods used to carry out initial assessment explained to the learner and agreed in advance?
- Do learners have a clear understanding of their learning and support needs?
- Are learners asked for feedback on the initial assessment process and do they find it a valuable experience?
- Do learners have a learning plan which shows clearly how their learning and support needs will be met?
- Do learners have a copy of their individual learning plan?
- Are learners involved in the production of their individual learning plan?
- Do learners agree with the contents of their learning plan?
- Do learners agree changes to their individual learning plan in response to additional needs identified during their reviews?

4. EMPLOYER INVOLVEMENT

- Are employers briefed on the importance and benefits of good initial assessment and learning plans?
- Are employers involved in assessing the suitability of a learner to undertake a particular type of job and how effective are they at this?
- Are employers involved in identifying an appropriate learning programme, which takes account of the needs of the learner and the job which they will be doing?
- Are employers encouraged to play an active role in the identification of a learner's learning and support needs?
- Do employers understand the learners' learning and support needs and do they know how they will address them?
- Are employers involved in the drawing up of the individual's learning plan?
- Do employers have a copy of each learner's individual learning plan?

5. MANAGING AND QUALITY ASSURING INITIAL ASSESSMENT AND LEARNING PLANS

- Do members of staff have a common and shared understanding of the purpose of initial assessment and individual learning plans?
- Does the provider have policies on initial assessment and individual learning plans which define what it is trying to do and written procedures on how the policies are implemented?
- If staff have responsibility for different parts of the initial assessment process and the drawing up of individual learning plans, do they work together to share information, agree findings and make decisions?
- Do staff seek to gather relevant information from external sources which may assist in the learner's initial assessment?
- Is a senior manager assigned responsibility for initial assessment and the production of individual learning plans?
- Do staff receive proper levels of support, advice and training on initial assessment and the production of individual learning plans?
- How does the provider keep itself updated on initial assessment practices and good practice?
- Does the provider aggregate and analyse the needs of its learners? Does the provider use this information to plan the learning programmes and allocate resources where needed?
- Do quality assurance procedures define which assessment methods should be used and how the outcomes of the initial assessment are collected, recorded and used in the same way for each learner?
- Do learner feedback systems gather information on the learners' views of the initial assessment process and the development of their learning plan?

- Are initial assessment methods regularly evaluated to assess their effectiveness and that they are fair to all learners regardless of race, gender and disability?

6. STAFF SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

Do staff who undertake initial assessment have knowledge and skills in:

- The purpose of initial assessment?
- Methods of identifying learning and support needs and collecting information?
- The learning programmes that are available within the provider?
- The requirements of specific learning programmes and occupational frameworks?
- Other providers who may be better placed to meet learners' needs?
- The requirements of employers?
- Processes and procedures for the accreditation of prior experience and learning?
- Initial assessment tools including basic skills, key skills and psychometric tests where appropriate?
- When additional specialist assessment may be required, such as diagnosing dyslexia or more severe learning difficulties?
- Interviewing and questioning techniques?
- How to put learners at ease?
- Positive feedback techniques?
- Methods of analysing and recording collected information?
- Different learning styles and ways of learning?
- Equal opportunities and non-discriminatory practices?
- Provider procedures for initial assessment including the handling of confidential information?

Do staff who design individual learning plans have knowledge and skills in:

- The requirements of specific learning programmes and occupational frameworks?
- Methods of designing and delivering learning programmes to meet learners needs?
- Training techniques.
- The outcomes of the initial assessment process?
- Learning opportunities within the workplace?

- How to integrate on- and off-the-job learning opportunities to create a coherent learning plan?
- Methods of monitoring and reviewing learners' progress?
- The resources available to them?
- Recording and documentation procedures?
- Issues of equality of opportunity and non-discriminatory practice?



Examples of Providers Effectively Using Different Methods to Undertake Initial Assessment

All the examples included in this section have been inspected by the Training Standards Council. For further information please see their inspection reports which are available on the TSC's website.

Interviews

North Derbyshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NDCCI) uses interviews as a fact-finding exercise to identify learners' learning and support needs, previous experience, prior achievements and occupational preferences. Their application form and record of achievement are used during the interview to assist with this process.

All staff involved in interviewing follow the same format when conducting interviews, following an aide memoire, which has been jointly developed by staff for this purpose. A standard format is used for the recording of information gathered during the interview.

Senior management of NDCCI recognise the importance of staff developing effective techniques for interviewing young people. All staff involved in recruitment and selection have undertaken modular training courses with either Sheffield Hallam University or the Open College Network to aid their development in this area.

The organisation gathers feedback from learners regarding their experience of the recruitment process as part of its feedback arrangements.

At **Tameside Quality Training** one-to-one interviews with prospective learners play a major part in their initial assessment process. All prospective learners are required to complete the college's application form. Everyone who submits an application form is invited to attend an interview and they are asked to bring their record of achievement with them. A structured interview process has been developed which all staff conducting interviews are required to follow. The interviewer and interviewee are required to sign a record to state what has been covered during the interview. Interviews cover:

- Discussion of candidate's application form.
- Candidates reason for choice of college.
- Career aims and aspirations.
- Travel to work area.
- Likes/dislikes.

- Personal skills.
- Hobbies and interests.
- Medical history.

Candidates are also provided with information on National Vocational Qualifications and how they work and different types of programmes.

Learners at **Joint Learning Partnership** who are already employed prior to starting their learning programme will be involved in an interview with an assessor who will gather information on their previous experiences, any previous training which they have undertaken and those areas where they may require support. If learners have completed any previous NVQs or units they will be asked to submit the necessary evidence. The organisation engages the services of an independent external verifier, on a freelance basis, to check these and agree prior achievements which can be accredited.

Key Skills Initial Assessment

Bolton Training Group (BTG) has recently purchased a commercial product to assist with the initial assessment of a learner's key skills following a successful pilot project with a sample of 24 modern apprentices already working towards key skills qualifications across three different occupational areas. The organisation decided to undertake the pilot project because it felt that it was not as clear on the training required by each learner for key skills as it was for the occupational NVQ. The assessment results showed that even where apprentices had good GCSE qualifications, this did not mean that they automatically did well on the assessments in application of number and communication. The assessments highlighted specific areas where support was required. This information has proved invaluable in planning future training to meet identified needs.

Psychometric Tests

Blackburn College use psychometric testing as part of their initial assessment strategy to support them in identifying the most appropriate occupational area and level of programme to place learners on. The outcomes from the psychometric assessment are used alongside other information, which has been gathered from the learner's application form and a one-to-one interview.

The assessment is undertaken prior to interview, by staff accredited to administer and interpret the tests. The results of the assessment are fed back to the prospective learner during their interview and this provides a focus for discussion around potentially suitable occupational areas and whether they would be more suited to undertaking a foundation or advanced modern apprenticeship or other training programme. It is not used as a selection tool simply to select the most able candidates.

Since introducing the assessment two years ago, Blackburn College has found it be a very useful tool in assisting with the identification of an appropriate occupational area and the level of programme to which the learner would be most suited.

Learner Questionnaires

Most of the learners that are referred to **Margaret Bardsley Management and Training Ltd (MBM&T)** come directly from employers. Staff from MBM&T spend considerable time with each employer discussing suitable learning programmes for each learner and agreeing those which are most appropriate. This is based upon both the needs of the employer and the actual jobs performed by learners. In order to identify individual learning and support needs MBM&T map each individual's job to the appropriate NVQ

framework. Each learner is then asked to complete a simple questionnaire identifying how often they perform each activity. The questionnaire is very simple to administer and learners will usually complete it within twenty minutes. On completion of the questionnaire each learner will discuss their responses with their assessor who will also ask them to identify what they perceive both their strengths and learning needs to be. The outcomes of this exercise are used to identify what training and support is required both for individuals and groups of learners through the aggregation of data. This information is used in the development of individual learning plans and the planning the implementation of learning programmes.

Group Activities

Girobank use an observed group activity as a method of collecting information about applicants during an assessment day which they hold for prospective learners. The purpose of the activity is to assess an individual's skills in working within a team, in particular communication and planning. Team work skills are regarded as one of the most important factors in the company's selection process. Individuals are divided into groups of four or five and jointly briefed on the task which they are required to undertake. Trained observers are allocated to each group and record on an observation report marks for maturity, understanding ideas/concepts, team work, initiative, oral communication and handling communication. Whilst this information assists in the selection of suitable candidates it is also used as part of the initial assessment process to identify a learner's learning and support needs.

Practical Vocational Activities

5Cs Training provide work 'tasters' as part of their foundation for work programmes for those learners who are not yet ready to enter mainstream training. Each 'taster' lasts approximately four weeks and suitable 'tasters' are agreed with learners during one-to-one discussions. Work tasters provide an opportunity for the learner to sample a different job and training in a realistic environment. The purpose of the process is to enable the learner to make a more informed choice of occupation.

5Cs see the 'tasters' also as providing a further opportunity to identify the specific training and support needs of each learner and to engage employers in this part of the process. Employers are asked to complete a pro-forma for each learner which details their views on such factors as: job interest, workmanship, initiative and behaviour.

As part of their initial assessment process **J.R.Taylor Training** ask all prospective hairdressing candidates to undertake a dexterity test to assess their suitability for a career in hairdressing. Learners are asked to brush and comb hair, wet hair, prepare hair for setting and plaiting, carry out basic roller winding and plait hair. They are also assessed for colour blindness, dexterity, hearing ability and memory retention. The information from the exercise is used to both assess a learner's suitability for a career in this area and to inform the development of the training plan. A detailed written record of the assessment is placed in the learner's file.



Example of Initial Assessment Summary Form

Learner details	
Name: <input type="text"/>	Date of birth: <input type="text"/>
NI Number: <input type="text"/>	Age: <input type="text"/>
Learning programme	
Learning programme to be followed:	
Qualifications to be sought and level:	
Career preferences and suitability	
Qualifications and achievements	
Aptitude and potential	
Prior learning and experience	
Basic Skills	

Key Skills

--

Learning difficulties

--

Interests

--

Learning style

--

Job role

--

Personal effectiveness

--

Personal circumstances

--

Summary of learning needs

--

Summary of support needs

--



Examples of Providers' Learning Plans

This sequence of examples is intended to illustrate how learning plans can be used to plan different aspects of the training in a variety of circumstances. The examples only give an indication of the sorts of approach that can be adopted. None of these on their own make for a good learning plan, they form part of a good learning plan. There are an infinite number of ways of designing a learning plan. Training providers need to decide what works best for them and for their learners. Learning plans are only effective if they are used as working documents. Use these examples as prompts for ideas.

On-the-job Learning Plans

Example 1 - On-the-job Training for a Single Learner

Name of learner: Kathleen Vigour						
Task	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
House-keeping						
Salon procedures						
Shampooing						
Conditioning						
Reception						
Neutralising						
Temporary colouring						
Semi-permanent colouring						
Permanent colouring						

Example 1 illustrates the idea of progression. Progression is more appropriate in some occupations than in others. The learner starts learning the simpler tasks. As the learner becomes more experienced he or she progresses to more complex tasks. Initial assessment may affect the tasks in the plan and the sequence of the tasks.

A learning plan such as this might represent the ideal sequence of learning the tasks at the start of the training. Circumstances may then alter the sequence. The flow of work in the organisation may prevent a particular task being carried out at the planned time because the work is not available or a supervisor is too busy. Alternatively, it may be in the learner's interest to grasp an opportunity that arises unexpectedly and may not be available later. The learning plan provides the basis for organising the on-the-job training but it must be sufficiently flexible so that it does not obstruct the training.

When amendments are made, a hand-written note on the plan (or an arrow) to show the change is all that is necessary. If an employer thinks they have to rewrite the plan every time an amendment is made then it will soon cease to be a working document.

Example 2 - On-the-job Training for a Group of Learners

Learner	Sept – Oct	Nov - Dec	Jan - Feb	Mar - Apr	May - Jun
Simon Buck	Fitting shop /IFR	Inspection	Maintenance	Machine shop	Electrical
Stephen Clark	Inspection	Maintenance	Machine shop	Electrical	Fitting shop /IFR
Miriam Davey	Maintenance	Machine shop	Electrical	Fitting shop /IFR	Inspection
Sam Langdown	Machine shop	Electrical	Fitting shop /IFR	Inspection	Maintenance
Victoria Lucas	Electrical	Fitting shop /IFR	Inspection	Maintenance	Machine shop

Example 2 shows how a group of learners with a single employer can each spend time working in different sections of the company. A different person in each section would supervise them. By rotating learners through the different sections the learners gain a wide range of experience. They learn a wide range of skills and can gather evidence of competence in each. Even if there is only one learner working in an organisation it is still possible to plan their on-the-job training to rotate them through a range of work areas.

The breadth of experience clearly depends of the size of the employer and the way they are organised. Smaller employers may not have separate work areas. The aim of such an on-the-job learning plan is to maximise the available opportunities. The situation in which a learner does just one job day after day should be avoided when there is valuable training and experience to be gained with a little forethought and planning.

Initial assessment may influence the order in which an individual learner rotates through the different section. An individual learner may miss one section or spend longer in one section depending on the results of the initial assessment.

Example of Effective Practice

FRL, an aerospace component manufacturing company, is an employer of learners of Dorset TEC. The engineering learners have a well-planned programme of on-the-job training. Learners have an individual movement plan, similar to example 2, that sets out where each learner will be working for the next 12 months. Learners rotate through departments to acquire different skills. They spend six weeks in each area of the factory during their first year. The training objectives in each area are clearly specified.

The plan is flexible and allows for changes when workloads and learners' circumstances alter. As the programme progresses learners are encouraged to choose the engineering specialism on which they wish to concentrate. Their on-the-job learning plan is amended to give them more opportunity to work in that area.

Off-the-job Learning Plans

Example 3 - Planning Off-the-job Training for a Group of Learners

	Off-the-job training session			
	Professional practice	Working as a team	Underlying principles	Physical well-being and development
Learner	24 Sept	4 Oct	12 Oct	19 Nov
Pat Naylor	✓	✓	✓	✓
David Esiri	✓	✓	✓	
Allan Hague	✓		✓	✓
Linda Place	✓	✓	✓	
Diane Ward	✓	✓	✓	✓
Robin Toole	✓	✓	✓	✓

Example 3 illustrates how a section of a childcare programme of off-the-job training sessions may be planned for a group of learners. Learners learn the theory or underpinning knowledge for their qualification.

Not all learners attend all sessions. A learner may not attend particular sessions because the initial assessment shows that he or she has already achieved the learning objectives. Alternatively, a learner may not need to learn particular topics because it is not relevant to their work or their qualification. Remember that additional learning beyond the minimum required for the qualification could be of benefit to the learner and may be seen as a strength of the learning programme.

Each session should also be planned. The objectives of the session or sessions should be clear. The structure of each session should also be planned together with the training methods and the materials to be used.

Example of Effective Practice

Delivery of all off-the-job training sessions at **Huyton Churches Training Services** is structured with a detailed plan and a set delivery time. Session plans typically include objectives, activities, training methods, materials, resources and evaluation arrangements.

The organisation insists that all learners attend off-the-job training. Learners can join the programme at any time on a roll-on roll-off basis. Almost all off-the-job training is delivered in-house. The occupational trainer keeps a register of attendance that includes the units or elements delivered in each session. This register is used to ensure that all learners have received the underpinning knowledge they require.

Co-ordination of On- and Off-the-job Training

Example 4 - Planning the Split Between On- and Off-the-job Training

Name of the training programme:		Administration level 2		
Training requirement	Off-the-job (provider's responsibility)	On-the-job (employer's responsibility)	NVQ unit	
Correspondence				
Standard replies	✓		7	
Individual replies	✓		7	
Composing letters	✓	✓	7	
Composing memos	✓	✓	7	
Composing documents (e.g. forms, notices, advertisements, listings, tables)	✓	✓	7	
Conventions	✓		7	
Presentation style	✓	✓	7	
Spelling, punctuation and grammar	✓		7	
Collation and distribution of organisation's documents		✓	7	

This extract in example 4 illustrates how the overall training that a learner is to receive is divided into off-the-job training and on-the-job training. In some occupations and on some learning programmes the separation may be obvious, but in others it may require careful planning.

This planning activity needs to be carried out at a meeting of the training provider and the employer. Using a format such as the one above is useful in structuring the discussion and as a record of what is agreed.

The learner should also be present at the meeting. It helps the learner to understand how his or her training is structured and the reasons why. They will also have a greater sense of ownership and responsibility for playing their part when it comes to implementing the plan. Note that the training is cross-referenced to the NVQ unit. The training requirements are not dictated by the NVQ unit but by the needs of the learner.

The results of the initial assessment determine in part the training requirements. They may also affect the choice between on and off-the-job training. For example, the learner may have already received sufficient off-the-job training for one of the topics and only need to learn how to apply it.

Example of Effective practice

RWP Training and Development in Cumbria asks employers to complete a training requirements form. Example 4 is an extract from their form. It is sent prior to a meeting between the training provider, the employer and the learner the purpose of which is to design the individual learning plan. The form acts as the basis for discussion that leads to the identification of the training requirements, both on- and off-the-job, and who is responsible for the training.

It is then used, together with the results of the learner's initial assessment, to design the individual learning plan. This includes a plan for the off-the-job occupational training as well as basic and key skills training.

Off-the-job training is through workshops run on a roll-on, roll-off basis. In addition to helping learners understand their off-the-job learning programme, RWP Training and Development send a revised workshop programme to the workplace supervisor every three months. The sessions the learner is advised to attend are highlighted. The start and finish time and venue of each session are clearly stated in the programme.

Example 5 Planning the Co-ordination of On- and Off-the-job Training

Learning objective	On-the-job activity	When?	Where?	Who?	Off-the-job activity	When?	Where?	Who?

Example 5 illustrates how the co-ordination of on and off-the-job training can be planned in advance and not just left to chance. This could be the complete learning plan for an individual learner or group of learners. Alternatively it could be used in addition to the separate plans purely for the purpose of co-ordinating the two.

One of the benefits of such a plan is that the learner, the off-the-job trainers and the workplace supervisors can all see where the co-ordination is expected to take place and can make it happen. The plan is a means of implementation as well as a plan.



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Aubrey Magill	DfEE
Vincent Keddle	DfEE
Bas Norris	DfEE
Jim Shaw	DfEE
Brian Teahan	DfEE
Graham Walker	DfEE
Phil Morgan	DfEE
Mark Kaczmarek	Connexions
John Harradence	Connexions
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