



Department  
for Education

# **Employer Involvement in Qualifications Delivery and Assessment**

**Research report**

**April 2014**

**Pye Tait Consulting**

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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

This final report sets out the findings from research to identify good practice in employer involvement in qualifications delivery and assessment, commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) and undertaken by Pye Tait Consulting. It reports on data drawn from 46 interviews with staff in Awarding Organisations (AOs), employers and training providers which were subsequently captured within 20 case studies. Each case study features qualifications meeting specific sample criteria.

The overarching aim of the research is to inform the Department's development of new Tech Level qualifications which will set out the 'full requirement' for Tech Levels, Applied General qualifications at Level 3 and in future technical qualifications at level 2 for 16-19 year olds.

'Employer Involvement' is a requirement for Tech Levels and in future technical qualifications at level 2 only.

The research sought to answer the following questions:

- What factors currently drive employer involvement in the delivery and assessment of vocational qualifications, and how?
- What could DfE require of qualification specifications that would, in turn, require employer involvement in the delivery and assessment of vocational qualifications?

The scope of this study involved examining approaches to the delivery and assessment of vocational qualifications where the majority of learning takes place in the classroom (as opposed to the workplace), but which still involves employers. The research took place during October through to January 2014.

## Method

A 'top-down' approach was employed; requesting from stakeholders their recommendations of good practice of employer involvement in qualifications delivery and assessment. The main eligibility criterion for qualifications to be considered for case study selection was that they be taken by 16-19 year olds, be occupationally-related and require or recommend the involvement of employers.

The final sample was based on these criteria:

- AO types: large, small and sector specialist;

- sector coverage in terms of primary, secondary and tertiary levels<sup>1</sup>;
- qualification levels (Qualifications Credit Framework (QCF) Levels 2, 3 and 4);
- qualification types (e.g. Purposes B, C, D<sup>2</sup>; for regulated or non-regulated occupations);
- qualification sizes (above 150 guided learning hours (glh));
- recommended or mandated employer involvement; and,
- types of employer involvement (work experience/placement, practice-based learning; synoptic assessments, setting exams or projects and so on).

Additional sources and organisations were enlisted to help increase the diversity of sectors and qualifications. In total the final sample of 20 qualifications includes qualifications from 12 AOs and, collectively, 14 sector subject areas<sup>3</sup> ranging from health and social care, to engineering, performing arts, accounting and finance.

Appendix 1 provides a list of the 20 qualifications with summary details. A topic guide formed the basis of (phone) interviews with AOs, employers and providers, and using a standard template, a sample of 20 case studies depicting key features and benefits to learners, employers and providers, were created (Appendix 2).

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<sup>1</sup> The primary sector is concerned with the production of raw materials. The secondary sector of the economy manufactures finished goods. The tertiary industries are those associated with the service sector.

<sup>2</sup> The list of qualification purposes (A-C) were developed in 2009 by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). Awarding organisations are required to allocate purposes for accredited qualifications.

<sup>3</sup> All regulated qualifications are assigned a Sector Subject Area code by the Awarding Organisation. Ofqual is the lead body for managing this classification system. The current version of the coding system was developed in 2001 and is located on the Ofqual website at "How We Regulate" > "Becoming a recognised awarding organisation" > "Applying for recognition" > "Sector Subject Areas."

## Key Findings

These findings are based on a sample of 20 qualifications from across 12 AOs. They are not intended to be representative of, nor necessarily demonstrate, all possible examples or combinations of employer involvement within qualification delivery and assessment.

### Types of employment involvement

- Employer involvement in the design of the qualification can often lead to further commitment to, and involvement in, delivery and/or assessment.
- The research found employers tend to get involved in more than just one type of activity, and that the most common (9 of the 14 sector subject areas) are work placements.
- When involved in providing work placements this often leads to further involvement, such as providing direct contact for the learners with customers/clients.
- The majority of activities identified in the case studies are linked more to 'delivery' than 'formal assessment', although there are examples of the latter taking place.
- There can often be a blurring of boundaries between delivery and assessment for employers.
- Continuing the relationship between centres and employers often leads to additional enrichment - such as coaching and mentoring, providing ideas/subjects for project work or delivery of talks.
- Employer engagement was also prevalent including the offer of premises, facilities or hosting visits.

### Achieving employer involvement

- Among their reasons for involvement in qualifications, employers cite a keenness to:
  - have an impact upon the quality of learning delivery; and
  - ensure the relevance of training to their business requirements.

These reasons for involvement are common motivating factors for employers, and were clearly articulated by nearly half of the 11 employers directly participating in this research.

- Four of the employers also confirmed that, for them, dissatisfaction with content and delivery of existing qualifications was a strong motivating element.
- The feedback from training providers implied a very similar rationale for seeking employer involvement.
- Existing networks of employers are a key factor for providers in being able to seek the involvement of employers into delivery and assessment more readily.
- Powerful drivers for employers include benefits for the learner which will ultimately benefit the sector. All employers interviewed were easily able to identify a range of ways that the learner would gain from sector involvement. Being able to improve learners' work-readiness, having the chance to impart sector requirements into content and assessment, and recruitment of better trained staff were all real motivators for employers.
- Maintaining the relationship between employers and providers is not always easy and a number of inhibitors were raised by both parties during interviews. These include shortage of time, resources, staff turnover and capacity; it was also highlighted, for instance, that for small and medium sized businesses such issues are particularly challenging.

### **Mandating employer involvement**

- The sample of 20 case study qualifications examined for this research includes 13 examples of mandated employer involvement, the remainder being recommended.
- Mandatory involvement ranges from work placements to tutoring teams which include employees with industry qualifications or specialisms, through to employment of the learner. It does not always follow that where employer involvement in the qualification is mandated that work experience is the mandatory element.
- Where there is mandatory involvement of employers, there are often numerous ways in assessment for employers to become involved; examples include assessment of written and practical coursework, assessment of the work placement, expert witness and testimony, among others.
- The seven case studies that recommend employer involvement provide many opportunities and examples for employers to get involved. Where employer involvement is set out as 'essential' in the specification within delivery or assessment, this is often for those units which are regarded as optional in the qualification structure.



- Those 13 qualifications tagged as mandated often use a mixture of required and recommended in their description of the qualification requirements. The mandatory aspect is usually made clear in the specification as being for those units which must be completed to achieve the qualification.

## Considerations regarding employer involvement

From the 20 case studies created and developed for this research as described above a number of considerations have been generated. These are discussed in the concluding section under the following headings:

- definitions and terminology;
- compatibility of training with the employment context;
- mutually supportive relationships;
- buy-in from senior management;
- commitment of trusted and knowledgeable staff;
- flexibility (from both the centre and employer perspective);
- employer engagement and brokerage;
- quality of delivery and assessment; and,
- burden on employers.

### Definitions and terminology

Clarity and clear understanding on use of terminology is a fundamental consideration. As noted in the report, “engaging” employers in the education and training process is, perhaps, not the same thing as “involving” them. Often official reports use these terms interchangeably. It is of prime importance that these terms are flexible in order to cater for the nuances of variations between. Caution will need to be exercised in any future stipulation, particularly in cases where employers have hitherto been accustomed to involvement in curriculum design and delivery in ways that mirror their sector characteristics (for example by providing specific premises and equipment), then only to learn that such activities would now be regarded, for the purposes of the Tech Levels, as engagement rather than involvement.

Similarly, clarity seems to be required for the specific terms ‘recommended’ or ‘mandated’ or even ‘required’ regarding employer involvement in Tech Level qualifications. The research identified at least four examples of wording in qualification specifications that imply an element of mandatory requirements - for example through the use of ‘must’ or ‘essential’ - and yet the AO preferred to classify employer involvement in the qualification as recommended. One reason given relates to the lack of any formal agreement between the AO and employers. This suggests the distinction between mandatory and recommended is not always as clear cut as it may first appear.

## **Compatibility of training with the employment context**

A match between the employer's day to day requirements and priorities and the training that is delivered within the centre is important. Involvement, in order to add value and be regarded as worthwhile, must be well-planned and targeted appropriately in support of defined learning outcomes.

The learning must reflect resources, facilities and technologies that the learner will be exposed to in the workplace. This is especially pertinent in sectors involving a high degree of technology (advanced manufacturing, engineering, software or hardware, etc). The report describes pertinent examples in the research within the 20 case studies.

## **Mutually supportive relationships**

Both the centre and the employer must recognise the benefits of employer engagement in qualifications and be committed to work together to support the development of learners, sharing responsibility for developing and maintaining the working relationship.

Recognition of the time constraints, commercial issues, and the need for both parties to fully understand what may well be an entirely different operational context is critical. These relationships take a long time and a lot of effort to establish.

## **Buy-in from senior management**

Not all providers have dedicated staff members responsible for employer liaison. An ideal situation is for centres to have staff to look after valuable employer relationships. Sector specific knowledge is important, too.

There must also be buy-in at a senior level (for employers and training providers) in order for the relationship to be successful over the longer term. Many of the relationships described by participants in this research were instigated by individuals where approval was sought from senior management after the relationship was established.

## **Commitment of trusted and knowledgeable staff**

Employer involvement is felt by both centres and employers to work best when both parties are confident in the capability and commitment of the other's staff. In partnering to deliver good quality provision, both parties need to commit to a workable arrangement, perhaps by adopting a simple service level agreement.

A written contract or memorandum of understanding with an employer is generally good practice, although it is commonly felt that informal involvement with employers offers the necessary degree of flexibility.

## **Flexibility (from both the centre and employer perspective)**

Providing learning in the evening is one such example where flexibility is required to fit in with employers' business requirements, but the economic implications of providers operating outside their normal teaching must be taken into account.

Flexibility is also beneficial in industries in which employers' workload is determined by the seasons and weather conditions (eg agriculture, forestry, and fishing). Ofsted noted that "being responsive and taking advantage of opportunities for assessment in the workplace at short notice"<sup>4</sup> is a common feature of best practice.

This research has continually found personal relationships to be at the core of successful employer involvement along with a combination of face to face meetings, telephone and e-mail communication to maintain relationships.

## **Employer engagement and brokerage**

Anecdotal evidence suggested that small to medium sized employers (SMEs) are more likely to take part in a programme of delivery if there are other employers, in particular larger branded companies, involved. Willingness and ability to engage is also influenced by their relationship with the centre and the type and level of involvement required of them.

The lack of business networks or forums as mentioned by many case study participants is a key challenge when seeking to engage with small businesses<sup>5</sup>. Being realistic about the level of involvement that is feasible for the employer is also vital. Case study participants stress early dialogue is key.

## **Quality of delivery and assessment**

The literature reviewed for this research illustrates that the quality of delivery and assessment is an important consideration when involving employers with little or no previous experience of teaching or assessing. Bell, Naven and Berrie (2010) point to some possible limitations of employer involvement in observations of learners, stating that employers are not usually trained assessors<sup>6</sup>. However this comment must be set against the fact that employers themselves undertake complex evaluations of staff, customers and products as regular practice.

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<sup>4</sup> Ofsted (2012) *Twelve outstanding providers of work-based learning*

<sup>5</sup> For example as mentioned by City and Guilds with respect to the Level 3 Diploma in Forestry and Arboriculture; and the Level 3 Diploma in Countryside Management

<sup>6</sup> Bell, I. et al. (2010), *Models of Recognition for Work-Related Learning in Higher Education*. Aiming University Learning @ Work.

## **Burden on employers**

The type of activities that employers are asked to provide are of critical importance, and consideration needs to be given to the extent to which employers have the capacity to take this on. Reassurances are required about an often mentioned concern by employers about being able to keep up with a plethora of constantly changing qualifications, standards, titles, organisations, funding regimes, and so on. Training providers and employers both need to consider carefully and clearly understand the level of commitment that each type of involvement may require of them balanced against the benefits on direct involvement in developing the future work force.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background to vocational qualification reform

In October 2013, the Department for Education commissioned Pye Tait Consulting to further their understanding of how employers are currently involved in the delivery and assessment of vocational qualifications. The overarching aim of the research is to inform the Department's development of new Tech Level qualifications which will set out the 'full requirement' for Tech Levels, Applied General qualifications and future technical qualifications at level 2.

The employer involvement characteristic will apply only to Tech Levels and to level 2 substantial qualifications. From September 2015 Tech Levels meeting this full requirement will be available for students to take, although it is anticipated that qualifications meeting the full requirements will not be ready until September 2016 (reported in 2018 performance tables).

Tech levels are approved high quality technical qualifications, publicly supported by industry, which prepare 16-19 year olds students for specific occupations. Tech Levels (and, in future, technical qualifications at level 2) must demonstrate nine characteristics including employer involvement which is the subject of this research and a range of further requirements relating to purpose, assessment, grading, employer recognition, purpose and track record. The characteristics were first published in 2013 in technical guidance for awarding organisations (AOs). These characteristics are to be further clarified in the spring of 2014 in new technical guidance.

The proposals for Tech Level qualifications stem from the Government's consultation in March 2013 on the reform of Level 3 Vocational Qualifications for 16-19 year olds, instigated in response to the findings of the 2011 Wolf Report into vocational education.

The widely reported findings of the Wolf review identified issues in the extant vocational qualifications offer for 16-19 year olds. These were considered, all too often, to leave young people with qualifications of very limited value, either to themselves, or to employers<sup>7</sup>.

The Government consultation proposed radical changes to vocational qualifications, building on the previous reform of vocational qualifications for 14-16 year olds.

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<sup>7</sup> Alison Wolf, *Review of Vocational Education – The Wolf Report*, March 2011

“the consultation set out proposals to ensure that only advanced vocational qualifications that are proven to provide progression to further learning or employment count in future 16-18 School and College Performance Tables”<sup>8</sup>.

Department for Education

Feedback from the consultation indicated general support by employers for involvement in delivering qualifications. This was reinforced in the Department for Education’s response in July 2013, which argued that work experience should be included as an integral part of vocational qualification delivery.

As an outcome of the consultation, three separate categories of qualifications were agreed:

1. Tech Level;
2. Applied General; and,
3. Academic (including A/AS levels, International Baccalaureate, Pre-U Principal/short course, AQA Baccalaureate Core).

Qualifications which fall under the first two categories must demonstrate pre-defined characteristics as rigorous as the requirements for the third category: academic qualifications.

### **Tech Level qualifications**

This new classification of vocational qualifications, designed for learners who wish to specialise in a technical occupation or occupational group, will provide opportunities for the learner to progress to employment, an Apprenticeship, or further learning.

The technical guidance for Awarding Organisations (AOs) states that in some cases, Tech Levels “can provide a ‘licence to practise’ or exemption from professional exams”<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Department for Education, *Consultation on the reform of Level 3 Vocational Qualifications for 16-19 year olds*, Government response, July 2013

<sup>9</sup> Department for Education, *Level 3 Vocational Qualifications for 16-19 year olds 2016 School and College Performance Tables: Technical Guidance for Awarding Organisations*, July 2013

The Department set out design rules for all vocational qualifications for 16-19 year olds: in order to be included in performance tables, both Tech Level and Applied General qualifications must demonstrate certain characteristics.

The characteristics and their requirements – against which AOs must submit evidence – (see Table 1 below) are taken from the Technical Guidance for AOs.

‘Employer Involvement’ is a requirement for Tech Levels only.

**Table 1 Technical Guidance for AOs on requirements of level 3 vocational qualifications counting in future performance tables**

In order to count in the 2016 16-19 performance tables, all level 3 vocational qualifications must demonstrate the following three characteristics:

<b>Declared Purpose</b>	Statements of purpose must clearly explain whether the qualification is primarily Technical Level or Applied General in nature.
<b>Size</b>	In order to count in the 2016 performance tables, a Technical Level Qualification must be at least 300 Guided Learning Hours (GLH).
<b>Recognition</b>	Technical Level Qualifications need to be recognised by employers (and Higher Education Institutions where appropriate) as developing and confirming specialist knowledge and skills relevant to an occupation or occupational group to a standard that can be reasonably expected of an 18 year old in full time education.

Additional characteristics that qualifications must demonstrate to be included in the future performance tables are given below. Note that these are subject to amendment in the light of further development work and research undertaken by the DfE and Ofqual.

<b>Synoptic Assessment</b>	AOs need to provide evidence that synoptic assessment <sup>10</sup> plays a significant role in confirming that a learner has achieved the standards required by employers e.g. what a learner should be able to know and do, in order to pass the qualification.
<b>External Assessment</b>	Minimum requirements for assessment: all knowledge and understanding to be subject to external assessment (for Applied General Qualifications this should make up the majority of the qualification's content); all internal assessments of skills-based content to be subject to external moderation.
<b>Grading</b>	Qualifications must be graded i.e. qualifications will have a pass, merit, distinction structure or a more detailed scale.
<b>Employer Involvement (Technical Level only)</b>	The qualification specification should stipulate the direct involvement of employers in delivery and/or assessment.
<b>Progression</b>	Within the first two years of a qualification being awarded, AOs should provide clear evidence of learners passing Technical Level Qualifications going on to secure related employment, apprenticeships, or places on related training or post-19 courses.

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<sup>10</sup> Synoptic assessment can be defined in a number of ways; but it is, essentially, a form of assessment which tests a learner's understanding of the connections between different elements of a subject.



<b>Synoptic Assessment</b>	AOs need to provide evidence that synoptic assessment <sup>10</sup> plays a significant role in confirming that a learner has achieved the standards required by employers e.g. what a learner should be able to know and do, in order to pass the qualification.
<b>Proven Track Record</b>	Qualifications need to be completed by at least 100 learners aged 16-19, in at least five centres, in at least one of the first two years that they are awarded. <sup>11</sup>

Despite general overall favourability towards employer involvement in delivery and assessment, the Government consultation on the reforms noted some concerns expressed by employers and training providers on implementing the proposals:

- Employers see, as a significant issue, the possible lack of time for them to be fully involved in the delivery and assessment of vocational qualifications.
- A number of training providers are concerned that employer involvement with assessments could result in inconsistency in awarding qualifications and grades<sup>12</sup>.

## 1.2 Educational context

The reform of level 3 vocational qualifications is being undertaken against a backdrop of wider change within the education and skills landscape. Much of this ongoing change drives the employer involvement agenda, notably with regard to the reform of Apprenticeship frameworks, the review of adult vocational education, introduction of Study Programmes including high quality purposeful work experience for all 16-19 year olds and the provision of careers information, advice and guidance.

### Apprenticeships

Proposed changes to apprenticeships stemming from the Richard Review will see individual employers gaining control of approved Government funding for their apprentices, while also contributing themselves to the cost of Apprenticeship training<sup>13</sup>.

The Government's policy for the reform of Apprenticeships, as laid out in *'The Future of Apprenticeships in England: Implementation Plan'*, takes forward most of the Richard Review recommendations, including the proposal that, in future, Apprenticeships will be

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<sup>11</sup> Where low take-up of a Technical Level Qualification is due to its content relating to a niche industry sector, technology or process, the AO is invited to seek exemption from this requirement by providing evidence that removing the qualification from performance tables would leave a gap in vocational provision and disadvantage economic growth.

<sup>12</sup> Department for Education, *Consultation on the reform of Level 3 Vocational Qualifications for 16-19 year olds*, Government response, July 2013

<sup>13</sup> Doug Richard, *The Richard Review of Apprenticeships*, November 2012

based on standards designed by employers to meet their needs and the needs of the wider economy.

‘Trailblazers’ in a range of sectors will test out a new model, with the intention of providing examples of effective practice. The document ‘*Guidance for Trailblazers*’ sets out the future intention for significantly revised and reduced standards and assessment requirements, the development of which will be led by employers<sup>14</sup>.

Announcements in the 2013 Autumn Statement took Richard’s Review one stage further: models will be explored that will route Government funding for apprenticeships through HMRC systems.

## **Adult Vocational Reform**

Two reports published in 2013 provided further impetus for involving employers in the delivery of training and qualifications.

The Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning (CAVTL) report made very clear recommendations that learners should have qualifications with a ‘clear line of sight to work’ thus enabling them – through the involvement of employers – to develop occupational expertise, and experience the job first hand in ‘a real working environment’.

Two of the main recommendations from that report were:

- to encourage a ‘two-way street’ between providers and employers, each making distinctive contributions for mutual benefit; and,
- for learners to have access to industry-standard facilities and resources<sup>15</sup>.

The Review of Adult Vocational Qualifications, published in November 2013, was a response to an invitation by the Skills Minister to develop a vision and strategy for adult vocational qualifications in England. The review built on a number of related reviews. The resulting report recommended – amongst many other points – that employers and unions work in partnership with AOs to design, develop and deliver vocational qualifications that “drive business growth and productivity”. Specifically:

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<sup>14</sup> HM Government, *The Future of Apprenticeships in England, Guidance for Trailblazers, Version 1* – October 2013

<sup>15</sup> Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning (CAVTL), *It’s about work...Excellent adult vocational teaching and learning*, March 2013

“Building on the success of the Employer Ownership Pilots, we propose that government continues to incentivise emerging and new industrial partnerships through co-investment to design, to develop and to deliver strong vocational qualifications, Tech Levels and Apprenticeships as an integral part of their strategies for growth in their sectors”<sup>16</sup>.

## **Careers Information Advice and Guidance (CIAG)**

Since the 2011 Education Act, the landscape of CIAG provision has changed, firstly with the introduction of the National Careers Service (NCS) and latterly with schools assuming responsibility for the provision of CIAG initially (in September 2012) for pupils in Years 9-11, which was extended (in September 2013) to include pupils from Year 8 to 16-18 year olds. Present throughout these recent reports is a continuing theme of increased involvement of employers in the provision of information, advice and guidance.

The Government response to Ofsted’s Thematic Review of Careers Guidance highlights a need for schools to “build strong connections with employers ensuring learners can benefit from sustained contact with inspiring people from the world of work supplemented by purposeful work experience and taster courses”<sup>17</sup>. The report challenges employers to work with the NCS and provide more detailed information to schools and careers guidance professionals.

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<sup>16</sup> N. Whitehead, *Review of Adult Vocational Qualifications in England*, November 2013

<sup>17</sup> DfE, BIS, *Careers Guidance Action Plan, Government Response to Recommendations from Ofsted’s Thematic Review and National Careers Council’s Report*, September 2013

## 2. Approach

### 2.1 Research objectives

The purpose of this research is to provide a better understanding of what motivates employer involvement in qualifications delivery and assessment, and how this could be formalised in future.

The research seeks to answer the following questions.

- What factors currently drive employer involvement in the delivery and assessment of vocational qualifications, and how?
- What could DfE require of qualification specifications that would, in turn, require employer involvement in the delivery and assessment of vocational qualifications?

With those in mind, the research involved:

- Engaging with Awarding Organisations (AOs) and other stakeholder bodies to identify where qualifications delivery and assessment is currently undertaken by employers.
- Liaising with providers and colleges to identify examples of employer involvement considered to be of good quality and to facilitate contact with appropriate employers.
- Consulting with identified employers to establish drivers for engagement, and the nature of interactions with centres.
- Reviewing relevant intelligence to inform the evidence base.
- Developing 20 case studies of employer involvement, across a range of industry sectors and qualification types.

The research took cognisance of other ongoing and recent research into vocational qualifications which, similarly, emphasise the importance of employer involvement. A bibliography section and references used in the compilation of this research are provided at the end of this report.

### 2.2 Methodology

The methodology employed in this study involved a 'top-down' approach which sought, from stakeholders, recommendations of good practice of employer involvement in qualifications delivery and assessment. These stakeholder organisations included,

primarily, AOs and also other employer representative bodies, training agencies, and government funded organisations.

Initial work, conducted by DfE in partnership with Ofqual, requested that AOs, via a proforma, nominate one or more qualifications featuring employer involvement in delivery and assessment. The overall aim was to prepare 20 case studies to illustrate a variety of qualifications demonstrating a range of employer involvement activities.

In total, 69 qualifications were nominated by 20 AOs. These were reviewed by Pye Tait Consulting for eligibility against a range of agreed criteria and a sample selected to cover a number of different variables. The main eligibility criterion for qualifications to be considered for case study selection was that they be taken by 16-19 year olds, be occupationally-related and require or recommend the involvement of employers. For this reason Apprenticeships and NVQs were initially excluded from consideration, these being predominantly work-based in both their delivery and assessment.

### 2.2.1 Sample selection

The variables considered in selecting the sample are detailed below. The research aimed to identify examples of good practice across a wide range of different sectors, and to include a number of different types of employer involvement.

An initial sample of qualifications was selected to provide a range of:

- AO types: large, small and sector specialist.
- Sector coverage in terms of primary, secondary and tertiary levels<sup>18</sup>.
- Qualification levels (Qualifications Credit Framework (QCF) levels 2, 3 and 4).
- Qualification types (e.g. Purposes B, C, D<sup>19</sup>; for regulated or non-regulated occupations).
- Qualification sizes (above 150 guided learning hours (glh)).

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<sup>18</sup> The primary sector is concerned with the production of raw materials and includes industries such as agriculture, forestry, mining and quarrying. The secondary sector of the economy manufactures finished goods; all of manufacturing, processing, and construction lies within the secondary sector. The tertiary industries are those associated with the service sector, such as healthcare, retail, hospitality, financial services and entertainment.

<sup>19</sup> The list of qualification purposes (A-C), developed in 2009 by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), was undertaken in consultation with members of the UK Vocational Qualifications Reform Board, including the qualifications regulators, the UKCES, the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils, the Federation of Awarding Bodies and the Joint Council for Qualifications. Awarding organisations are required to allocate purposes for accredited qualifications.

- Recommended or mandated employer involvement.
- Types of employer involvement (work experience/placement, practice-based learning; synoptic assessments, setting exams or projects and so on).

A preliminary sift, based on qualification size alone, immediately eliminated 33 qualifications from the pool of 69 from further consideration. A further 24 organisations were contacted to increase the diversification of the sample; these organisations included Sector Skills Councils, National Skills Academies, The Association of Colleges, UKCES among others.

After checking the sample only included a range of qualifications of different sizes of glh, but above 150 glh, relevant AOs were alerted that their selected qualifications were being considered for the development of case studies and asked to confirm:

- Their continued willingness to be involved in the project; and,
- that they would be able to supply contact details of relevant providers and employers to take part in case study interviews.

## **Final Sample**

The final sample of 20 qualifications, including information on qualification accreditation number, credit value and guided learning hours, is included in Appendix 1.

The list encompasses 20 case studies covering qualifications from 12 AOs. These, collectively, cover 14 sector subject areas ranging from health and social care, to engineering, performing arts, accounting and finance. All 20 case studies are provided in Appendix 2.

Table 2 below makes use of the Sector Subject Area Classification (SSAC) system<sup>20</sup> used by AOs to categorise regulated qualifications.

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<sup>20</sup> The SSAC contains 15 sector subject areas at Tier 1, which is then disaggregated further into 48 classifications at Tier 2 – see <http://ofqual.gov.uk/files/2010-11-26-statistics-glossary.pdf>.

**Table 2 Final sample of qualifications by sector subject area**

Subject Sector Area (SSA)	The focus for the 20 case studies
1.3 Health and Social Care	Level 3 Diploma in Health and Social Care (Adults) for England
1.5 Child Development and Well-Being	Level 3 National Certificate in Children's Play, Learning and Development
3.2 Horticulture and Forestry	Level 3 Diploma in Forestry and Arboriculture
3.2 Horticulture and Forestry	Level 2 Diploma in Work-based Horticulture
3.3 Animal Care and Veterinary Science	Level 3 Diploma In Veterinary Nursing
3.4 Environmental Conservation	Level 3 Diploma in Countryside Management
4.2 Manufacturing Technologies	Level 4 Diploma in Technical Textiles and Apparel
4.2 Manufacturing Technologies	Level 4 Foundation Degree in Dairy Technology
4.3 Transportation Operations and Maintenance	Level 2 Diploma in Aviation Operations on the Ground
5.2 Building and Construction	Level 3 Principal Learning in Construction and the Built Environment
5.2 Building and Construction	Level 2 Diploma in Steelfixing Occupations (construction)
6.1 ICT Practitioners	Pre-apprenticeship Level 2 Programme of Study in IT
6.1 ICT Practitioners	Level 3 Certificate in Open Systems Computing
7.3 Service Enterprises	Level 2 Diploma in Women's Hairdressing
7.3 Service Enterprises	Level 2 Diploma in Beauty Therapy Studies
7.4 Hospitality and catering	Level 2 Diploma in Professional Cookery
8.1 Sport, Leisure and Recreation	Level 4 Certificate in Weight Management for Individuals with Obesity, Diabetes Mellitus and/or Metabolic Syndrome
8.1 Sport, Leisure and Recreation	Level 2 Certificate in Activity Leadership
9.1 Performing Arts	Level 3 Extended Diploma in Music Technology
9.4 Publishing and information Services	Level 3 Diploma in Journalism

Following final agreement on the sample with DfE, AOs were approached directly to obtain contact details of a training provider and an employer involved in the delivery and/or assessment of each qualification. In some cases one organisation fulfilled the role of both employer and training provider. A total of 46 interviews with AOs, employers and providers, plus follow-up calls to verify aspects of the final case studies, were conducted.

These interviews used a thematic topic guide to prompt open discussions: the themes were:

- **The background to the qualification** – its purpose, the features and characteristics that make it suitable for employer involvement.
- **The type of involvement** – e.g. provision of work placements; setting projects; setting and/or marking exams and so on.
- **Details of the involvement** – how and why the relationship arose, how long it has been in place and whether or not it is formalised in any way.
- **Challenges and support** – barriers to involvement from both provider and employer perspectives, ongoing support required, how relationships are managed day-to-day.
- **Benefits of employer involvement** – for learners, the employer and the provider.
- **Future involvement and reflection** – how the nature of employer involvement may change or develop in future and lessons learned.

The case study work was supported by a review of relevant literature (see references) which sought to identify existing examples of good practice in involving employers in delivery and assessment of other qualifications, as well as lessons which may be transferrable to the specific context of Tech Levels.



## 3. Types of employer involvement

### Key Findings

These findings are based on a limited sample of 20 qualifications across 12 AOs and 14 sector subject areas. They are not, therefore, intended to be representative of, nor necessarily demonstrate, all possible examples or combinations of employer involvement within qualification delivery and assessment.

- Employer involvement in the design of a qualification can often lead to further commitment to, and involvement in, delivery and/or assessment.
- Employers tend to get involved in more than one type of activity, with the most common activity mentioned in all case studies being work experience/ placements.
- When involved in providing work placements this often leads to further employer involvement, such as providing direct contact for the learners with customers/clients.
- The majority of activities identified in the case studies are linked to 'delivery' than in 'formal assessment', although there are examples of the latter taking place.
- There can often be a blurring of boundaries between delivery and assessment for employers.
- Continuing the relationship between centres and employers often leads to additional enrichment - such as coaching and mentoring, providing ideas/subjects for project work or delivery of talks.
- Employer engagement is also prevalent through the offer of premises, facilities or hosting visits.

### 3.1 Introduction – employer involvement

Employer involvement in vocational qualifications delivery and assessment takes many forms, but is perhaps most often associated with competence-focused qualifications such as NVQs and in employing Apprentices.

In this respect the employer is typically involved with managing, coaching and mentoring the learner and providing witness testimony while the learner or Apprentice is employed and undertaking work-based training.

The scope of this study involved, in the main, examining approaches to the delivery and assessment of vocational qualifications where the majority of learning takes place in the classroom (as opposed to the workplace) but which still involves employers in some way.

Much of the literature<sup>21</sup> on the subject of employer involvement focuses on the work-based learning model, however the activities are still relevant and transferable to other vocational contexts. Such examples include<sup>22</sup>:

- providing the learner with training in the workplace, allowing them to practise these while being observed by, and learning from, their manager or supervisor;
- assigning projects to the learner;
- working collaboratively with the learner to ensure that they put into practise the skills they have been learning; and,
- attending regular progress meetings with the training provider to discuss the learner's progress.

Employer involvement can also take a much more dynamic form, drawing on a diverse range of learner, provider and employer interactions. These include a broad range of opportunities and activities, and are identified in a number of sources of literature. The examples listed below have been taken from guidance for Studio Schools on working with employers:

- using businesses as the basis for projects to further learners' knowledge of the working world;
- businesses providing education visits to their workplace;
- employers providing feedback on individual learners after the completion of a project;
- businesses getting involved with helping to market products learners have been involved in producing;
- offering mentoring to learners;
- providing master classes; and,
- enabling learners to access the business' facilities, contacts and networks, and material for individual projects<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> See full list of literature reviewed in the section headed References. A fuller list of relevant reports is provided in the Bibliography.

<sup>22</sup> These examples are based on information contained in Heart of England Training Ltd, '*An Employers' Guide to Apprenticeships & Work-Based Learning*', 2013

<sup>23</sup> Sourced from information on 'Getting involved with a Studio School':  
[www.studioschoolstrust.org/employers/getting-involved-studio-school](http://www.studioschoolstrust.org/employers/getting-involved-studio-school)

The types of employer involvement identified in this research include many of the above examples, and more. The research found it was relatively uncommon for employers to restrict their involvement to only one type of activity. For example, an employer may express initial interest in, or agree to offer, work placements which, over time, might extend to further engagement by supporting learners through coaching and mentoring.

The case study interviews also identified that in more than eight instances employer involvement was initially secured by their inputting in to design and development of the qualification, or programme of learning. In some of these instances there is an element of overlap between design and delivery – such as where employers are involved in setting projects. The research also identified several instances of overlap between design of the qualification and being involved in assessment activities – such as setting exams and marking schemes. In other words: design, delivery and assessment are rarely mutually exclusive activities and, as such, it is not always possible for them to be cleanly segregated from one another.

The sections that follow describe the types of involvement most commonly undertaken by employers participating in this research, starting with ‘work experience/placements’.

## **3.2 Delivery**

### **3.2.1 Providing work placements**

Although many centres are able to provide simulated or small scale working environments, such as small manufacturing units, newsrooms or salons, first hand involvement in a real commercial working environment is highly valued by both employers and providers and, anecdotally, by learners.

This type of involvement was specifically noted by employers involved in the delivery of qualifications across 15 of the 20 case studies included in this report , where it appears to be generally accepted practice<sup>24</sup>. These relate to nine sectors: children’s play, learning and development; construction; hairdressing; hospitality; horticulture; health and social care; journalism; ICT; and, manufacturing.

In 10 qualification specifications the provision of work experience is mandated (for example the Level 3 Diploma in Forestry and Agriculture), but for 10 it is only recommended. Even though the skills learned are predominantly practical and, therefore, might arguably benefit from development in the workplace, the practice is only

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<sup>24</sup> We note further on that in fact all case studies refer to work experience/placements but that it was not always noted by ‘employers’.

‘encouraged’ or ‘recommended’. This was found to be the case, for example, in the Professional Cookery qualification, where although work experience is regarded as “good practice”, it is not mandatory.

In one example where the practice is deeply embedded, the college<sup>25</sup> provides employers with an outline of what they are looking for in terms of work experience and an indication of the level the learner is working at.

Work experience/placements are not only valued because of exposure to a real working environment, but also because of the varied additional opportunities that are afforded the learner. These include the opportunity to develop a portfolio of evidence, or to tailor a project to a tangible working example. Indeed, in every one of the case studies in which work experience is undertaken, this was only one of many types of employer involvement.

Work experience is not, however, regarded as convenient for every sector. Although in the instance of hairdressing, the importance of such opportunities is accepted as a means of learning the trade, the situation is perhaps not as straightforward in the related area of beauty therapy. Although work experience is highly recommended, as one case study respondent commented, in an industry dominated by small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating on small premises it is not always helpful to have a trainee where space and time is at a premium. Furthermore, due to the almost ‘clinical’ nature of many of the procedures involved in that industry it is not always easy or straightforward for skills to be taught or learned ‘on the job’.

### **Other activities prompted by involvement in work experience**

Although it is not possible to state with certainty, it appears that other types of involvement – such as coaching, mentoring, setting projects and so on – are usually facilitated by, or are a product of, employers being involved with work experience.

In the majority of those examples, coaching and mentoring arose naturally as part of the provision of work experience. In some cases this extends beyond the life of the work placement (if undertaken in a block), but was more common where work experience was undertaken as part of a regular arrangement where a relationship had been formed between the learner and their workplace supervisor.

Two examples taken from case studies where work experience is either recommended or mandated, illustrate this:

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<sup>25</sup> Throughout this report we sometimes use the term college or centre to refer to the overarching phrase ‘training provider’.

- **Children’s Play Learning and Development:** whilst a learner is placed at a ‘setting’ (i.e. with an employer), the setting supervisor supports the learners with an initial induction and then on a daily basis to discuss and negotiate opportunities to work within the daily routine. The supervisor will sign-off the learner as competent in their Skills Log and at the end of the placement he or she will complete a final report.
- **Journalism:** during a recommended period of at least two weeks’ work experience, the learner is able to use the opportunity to add to their portfolio for which they must complete a minimum of 10 articles, or broadcast packages.

The length of work placements is also variable and can be undertaken either as block placements – usually a minimum of two weeks’ duration – or at regular intervals, such as one to two days per week.

### **Providing contact with customers/clients**

Both employers and centres set great store by learners gaining first hand exposure to the situations and cases that workers within their sector deal with regularly. This has been identified by research participants as a tangible value of work experience and examples of this have been found in delivery of the following qualifications:

- Level 4 Certificate in Weight Management for Individuals with Obesity, Diabetes Mellitus and/or Metabolic Syndrome: clients, for example the NHS, are involved in the delivery of assessed seminars, with learners providing information to groups of patients through verbal feedback;
- Level 3 Diploma in Hairdressing: learners support stylists in their interactions with customers; and,
- Level 3 Diploma in Beauty Therapy: exposure to real clients enables the learner to build inter-personal skills.

### **Training and coaching teaching staff**

In addition to contributing to assessment tasks – whether setting assignments or exams, or assisting assessors – employers are also involved in more formal mechanisms for up-skilling provider staff. The research found employers involved in this way in the delivery of the following case study qualifications:

- Level 2 Diploma in Aviation Operations on the Ground; and,
- Pre-Apprenticeship Level 2 Programme of Study in IT.

For the Level 4 Certificate in Weight Management for Individuals with Obesity, Diabetes Mellitus and/or Metabolic Syndrome the qualification demands that tutors involved on the course have industry registration – in this case they must be on the Register of Exercise Professionals (REPs).

### **3.2.2 Further enrichment of delivery by employers**

#### **Coaching and mentoring**

First-hand experience, gained from a seasoned professional, is highly regarded by learners as adding significantly to their course of study. The value is in employers giving their time to support the delivery of the qualification and to develop new talent within their sector. Over 50% of those case studies that involved a work placement or work experience also made mention of coaching and mentoring by employers.

#### **Providing subjects for project work**

Just as coaching and mentoring of learners has been found to be a product of work experience, learners requiring ideas or subjects for project work tend to base these on their work experience with employers.

This link between work experience provision and project work has been specifically reported in the following case study qualifications:

- Level 3 Principal Learning in Construction and the Built Environment;
- Level 3 Certificate in Open Systems Computing; and,
- Pre-Apprenticeship Level 2 Programme of Study in IT.

#### **Delivering talks**

Talks by industry experts and ‘industrialists’ are an example of direct interactions between employers, providers and learners and of the employer or industry representative taking on an informal teaching role. This activity may take place either within the centre, or at the employer’s premises; the opportunity may arise through the example given below of the use of employer premises, facilities and equipment.

This type of activity differs from the first two examples in this section in that it tends to be viewed as a 'one-off' engagement activity, requiring minimal commitment from the employer, other than preparatory and direct delivery time.

Interacting directly with learners in this way means that employers are able to motivate learners and to provide insight into an occupational role or sector-area based upon first-hand experience which, centres believe, learners value greatly. Talks and presentations have value in informally supporting learning, but the research also found examples of employer talks being used to contribute directly to the formal delivery and requirements of a specific unit, or units.

Two relevant examples include:

- The delivery of a talk on marketing to contribute toward the achievement of 'Marketing and Promotion in the Music Industry' in the Level 3 Extended Diploma in Music Technology.
- Speakers from supply chain companies delivering talks in support of a module on automation for the Foundation Degree in Dairy Technology.

The Level 4 Diploma in Technical Textiles also incorporates provision for talks from industrialists in the delivery of certain units.

## **Tutoring and lecturing**

It is not uncommon for employer staff to be involved with formal teaching duties on a part-time basis. The practice is recognised in the delivery of the Level 3 Diploma in Forestry and Arboriculture where some of the part-time lecturers employed by the case study provider are business owners themselves.

According to one interview participant there is a history of employers in the horticulture and forestry sector carrying out this dual role of providing sector expertise and teaching. This same practice has also been noted by another interview participant in the hospitality and catering sector, again where a number of the lecturers at the provider base are employed part-time in the industry.

A key benefit of employing such 'dual-professionals' as described by another interview participant in the health and social care sector is that it provides the college with a large number of industry contacts to draw upon.

### **3.2.3 Employer Engagement**

Employers and providers may regard the activities discussed below as levels of employer involvement. Deciding if this is about employer engagement rather than employer involvement depends on agreements on definitions and acceptance of terminology (see section 6). For the purposes of this report, the following activities in this section have been identified as examples of employer engagement rather than employer involvement as these activities do not directly involve delivery or assessment of a qualification.

#### **Offering premises, facilities and equipment**

Activities such as the opportunity to deliver learning within working premises are highly valued by centres. Such instances provide learners with exposure to a 'real time' working environment, giving them experience of how a workplace operates day to day.

In the example of the Level 3 Diploma in Journalism, this is achieved by delivering part of the qualification in the newsroom of a large regional newspaper publisher. When quiet classroom delivery is required, it is possible to segregate the teaching part of the room from the buzz of the working environment.

Employers taking part in this research value the opportunity to provide experience of up to date and varied operational resources, which centres may be unable to provide often because of restrictions of cost and/or space.

One such example is the Level 3 Extended Diploma in Music Technology, delivered by a college, (in part in classroom space rented from the local civic hall). The arrangement allows the college to deliver learning in a real performing arts venue, and provides the learners with access to up-to-date industry equipment.

#### **Hosting visits**

At least two examples were provided of formal visits to employer premises being used in support of delivery. One of these instances, below, provides a further example of an industry, or context, in which a work placement is not convenient but where an alternative mechanism can add value.

In the aviation industry, where workplace security is a major issue, a well-structured workplace visit or field-trip can provide valuable learning opportunities. In this instance, the timing is critical - visits take place around 4am which is a busy period for international airports.



A further example is the provision of the Level 2 Diploma in Steelfixing Occupations, where the factory environment is considered the best context for delivering the practical content of the qualification.

## **3.3 Assessment**

### **3.3.1 Designing, marking and moderating assessments**

Six case study employers specifically mentioned the need for assessment tasks to be relevant and current to industry requirements and practice. The input of employers into the design of exams and assessments provides further assurance that assessments are reflective of current sector skills and knowledge requirements.

In addition, employers often provide indirect support to centres. This can include the provision of materials and in some cases information such as ideas for projects and past examples of work that can be used by learners in research tasks for the achievement of their qualification.

In the case of the Diploma in Journalism, industry practitioners are heavily involved in the setting and marking of the National Council of Training of Journalists (NCTJ) examinations, which are designed to meet industry standards and ensure learners can apply their skills to 'real-world' scenarios. Qualified journalist trainers and practitioners are also involved in the assessment of written and practical coursework.

For the Level 2 Diploma in Professional Cookery, chefs from local restaurants or hotels assist with second marking of synoptic tests.

All of the technical exercises for the Level 2 Diploma in Steelfixing have been created and developed by an employer in partnership with the AO and training providers.

Members of a trade association for open source software companies have contributed to developing exam papers and will be supporting teachers/assessors with coursework requirements for the Level 3 Certificate in Open Systems Computing.

### **3.3.2 Workplace observations/testimony**

Employer involvement in workplace observations and witness testimony – more often associated with the assessment of competence qualifications – is a feature among at least 11 of the case study qualifications. In the Level 2 Certificate in Activity Leadership case study, for example, the employer regards the real value of the qualification as being the regular, formal workplace observations undertaken by the learner's line manager.

### **3.3.3 Employers forming part of the assessment process**

Employers feature as a fundamental part of the assessment process; altogether seven case studies refer to employers' assessing learners' practise in the workplace. Examples of these include the Level 3 Diploma in Countryside Management and Level 3 Diploma in Forestry and Arboriculture; the employer is involved in formal assessment of the qualification unit where the learner is working on placement (at the workplace). A further example is the Level 3 Diploma in Veterinary Nursing where employers are now predominately responsible for the assessment as well as practical training for the qualification.

## 4. Achieving employer involvement

### Key Findings

There are a number of common causal factors which lead to employer engagement and on-going involvement in qualifications, many of which naturally link to, or stem from, identified benefits to learners, providers, the employer, and/or to the wider sector or economy.

- Among their reasons for involvement in qualifications, employers cite a keenness to:
  - have an impact upon the quality of learning delivery; and
  - ensure the relevance of training to their business requirements.

These reasons are common motivating factors for employers and were clearly articulated by nearly half of the 11 employers directly participating in this research.

- Four of the employers clarified that dissatisfaction with content and delivery of existing qualifications was a strong motivating element.
- The feedback from training providers implied a very similar rationale for seeking employer involvement.
- Existing networks of employers are a key factor in providers being able to seek the involvement of employers more readily into design, delivery and assessment.
- Powerful drivers for employers include benefits for the learner which will ultimately benefit the sector. All employers interviewed were easily able to identify a range of ways that the learner would gain from sector involvement.
- Being able to improve learners' work-readiness, having the chance to impart sector requirements into content and assessment, and recruitment of better trained staff were all real motivators for employers.
- Maintaining the relationship between employers and providers is not always easy and a number of inhibitors were raised by both parties during interviews. These include shortage of time, resources, staff turnover and capacity in particular for SMEs.

## 4.1 Motivating factors

### 4.1.1 Initial involvement and motivation

Motivations for employers getting involved was genuine concern about:

- **The content:** not always being applicable to industry requirements. Examples given include course content containing very little practical content, insufficient coverage of specialised knowledge, or the content did not reflect current practice and was therefore not regarded as fit for purpose.
- **A proliferation of courses:** creating confusion in the market, and concerns about the real quality of 'qualified' recruits.
- **Insufficient coverage across skill levels:** a gap had been identified in a region at the intermediate level.
- **Insufficient real world experience:** a lack of hands-on experience of the working environment and transferable skills of value.

What is interesting is the emphasis on the conceptual inter-relationship between design, delivery and assessment. As noted earlier, initial involvement in delivery and assessment is often stimulated by some form of input into qualification design, which then evolves naturally due to a sense of ownership.

In more than half (11) of the case studies – including those involving relatively new qualifications – the involvement of employers was secured through existing networks developed over time by each training provider. But in many of these cases the 'hook' for employers has been the opportunity to have some form of input into the design of the course, whether into the design of the regulated units, the range of units the training provider chooses to offer, or the design of the training package and learning materials.

"The College tries to engage flexibly with the employer involvement agenda by being industry-led, and this is one such example. Employers are involved in influencing the delivery and also the actual course content, and are further involved in assessment."

Employer

For other employers the purpose of their involvement is more complex. As one employer explained:

“Part of what we do comes under the banner of corporate social responsibility but that’s not why we do it”

Employer

In this example the primary motive for involvement was, however, dissatisfaction with the current training offer.

For other employers, their involvement can be explained by what appear to be more altruistic drivers but can often derive from commercial imperatives.

“It’s nice to be part of educating the next generation”

Employer

Much discussion on employer involvement centred on, and is associated with, benefits for learners: for example how such interactions can improve outcomes as well as provide learners with the opportunity to develop, in a work environment, the practical skills and knowledge demanded by employers.

Benefits for learners are myriad and are, perhaps, more easily discernible or more immediate than benefits for employers or training providers.

Employers interviewed for this research were quick to identify numerous benefits for learners, many of which were intimately linked to the employers’ motivation for involvement.

Analysis of these ‘benefits’ reveals powerful drivers for employer involvement in vocational qualifications delivery and assessment, the two being mutually supportive.

All employers interviewed were able to suggest one or more such benefits that they could foresee for learners:

- gain a set of vocationally relevant skills and confidence to apply these in a real work environment;
- develop an understanding of the reality of work, the requirements of employers and the opportunity to develop ‘employability’ skills, such as problem solving;

- benefit from working alongside skilled workers as part of a team thereby learning about teamwork;
- have the opportunity to become familiar with industry specific terminology which can aid their studies;
- can develop familiarity and expertise with up to date resources, such as sector specific technology or machinery;
- have the opportunity to network with other learners and potential employers;
- are able to identify a clear career progression route;
- develop interview skills and have the opportunity to practice these with real employers;
- are able to develop a valuable 'work ethic' and appropriate workplace behaviours; and,
- gain knowledge directly relevant to the job role.

At least five industry sectors consider themselves to have a strong pedigree when it comes to employer involvement; these include social care, hairdressing, journalism, construction and manufacturing, among others – and appear to have a greater motivation to be involved in qualification assessment and delivery than employers from sectors where their involvement is perhaps less of a tradition. This may be because, in these sectors, networks of participating employers are often well-established.

Case study employers, from sectors where work-based learning is an embedded feature of training, view employer involvement in qualifications as a valuable aspect of a learner's preparation for work-readiness for an occupation. This is a notable feature of qualifications in the sectors, as mentioned above, with strong traditions of work-based learning and Apprenticeships. An improvement in new entrants' work-readiness - familiarity with resources, terminology and work practices – as well as employability skills will ultimately bring valuable rewards to a sector and should reduce long term skills deficiencies.

The need to increase diversity within a sector can be a further motivation for employer involvement, this was raised as a specific motivator by two interview participants – from the ICT sector and from journalism. These research participants articulated the desire to create a diverse pool of highly skilled staff recognising that, historically, their sector's intake has been exclusive to some sections of society. They also believe that, promoting employability and highlighting multiple career pathways within sector areas, can be used as a lever to attract applicants from a greater variety of backgrounds and experience.

## 4.2 Instigating and maintaining the relationship

In a quarter of cases, employer involvement was achieved through the use of existing networks of employers who are known by the training provider to have been involved in qualifications delivery or assessment in the past, or who have expressed an interest in becoming involved.

Sector forums and networking events are perhaps the least often mentioned means of involvement by which employers are engaged in delivery and assessment. The mechanism is no less valuable however than other, more direct types of involvement and, where these interactions are routinely undertaken, the training provider values them highly.

For example, the case study provider of the Level 2 Diploma in Professional Cookery reportedly holds a number of events, finding they are excellent for networking opportunities. In the horticulture and forestry sector, a sector like many others dominated by SMEs, the case study provider invites employers to stakeholder events to input into reviews of learning content.

Although stated by participants as a strength, existing networks can also be regarded as a weakness in engagement strategies in that they tend to consist of already-committed employers with often very specific and sometimes narrow skills needs.

Where there were exceptions, cold approaches were required in order to fulfil the provider's desire to involve employers in delivery and assessment in some way: securing employer engagement is achieved through visits and phone calls to local employers both by delivery staff and by dedicated employer engagement staff. These cold approaches were used in combination with attending local industry functions and networking events, as well as working in partnership with Sector Skills Councils (SSC), other industry representative bodies and local business networks.

To encourage employer involvement, one training provider offered the incentive of free use of their facilities and meetings rooms.

The benefits for employers of involvement in qualifications may be considered less immediate than those experienced by the learner but they are, nonetheless, important motivators for continuing engagement with delivery and assessment.

The drivers of continuing employer involvement can be broadly divided into direct (immediate) and indirect (longer term) benefits.

### 4.2.1 Direct employer benefits

Through their interactions and contacts with learners, several direct benefits that employers suggested or identified are:

- an independent viewpoint - involvement with young people can generate and encourage innovation and new ideas;
- an easy to access/ready-made recruitment channel, thus reducing the risk of employing people insufficiently acquainted with the requirements of the job or sector; and,
- involvement also has the effect of motivating and developing existing staff who can benefit from participation with centres, and by sharing their experiences they can develop new skills of their own.

### 4.2.2 Indirect employer benefits

Developing links with schools and colleges can raise the profile of businesses within the local community or sector area.

Employers are assured that learners are being equipped with the necessary practical skills and knowledge, as required by industry. This benefit, although not immediately fulfilled, has value to the sector more widely by ensuring an adequately skilled supply of talent. It also has benefits for the whole skills value-chain. Collectively, the outcome will be a workforce that is ready and able to contribute as soon as they enter the workplace. Employers will also have certainty that individuals who have completed the qualification will all be at an equal standard.

Not only does this give employers a potential means to address skills gaps within their organisation, but learners could make an important contribution to the success of the business.

For example, employers in three sectors have described the important opportunity afforded to them of 'moulding' learners to industry requirements. In this sense, industry is also given a unique and up-to-date insight to the wider education and training environment, and learning techniques for developing their own staff.

It also enables employers to influence the delivery of qualifications so that they are confident those qualifications are meeting their needs.



As one training provider noted:

“Employers might have a hand in making sure provision is what they need it to be”

Training Provider

### 4.3 Training provider motivations

From the perspective of the training provider, many benefits, which also act as drivers of continual involvement, have been identified from the research.

For the training provider, the input of the employer provides a number of advantages and reassurances that learners are developing true vocational skills and knowledge; for provider staff there are direct and indirect benefits from maintaining a dialogue with industry, the most obvious being continuing professional development through direct industry interaction which, naturally, serves to maintain occupational and sector specific knowledge. This is especially valuable in sectors involving high levels of specialist, technical skills and those that make use of continually evolving technologies.

The involvement of the employer also ensures that, crucially, courses are vocationally relevant and that learners acquire employability, transferable skills - the latter being highly relevant for either progression to Higher Education or into employment.

Just as inputting into the qualification design is often a means of securing initial involvement, the ongoing maintenance of that provision is also regarded as a motivator for continuing employer involvement. In one example, the training provider maintains its links with industry through employer involvement in qualifications delivery and assessment and in so doing builds a reputation amongst the industry.

The ongoing relationship presents the training provider with the opportunity to learn more about the industry in question and, simultaneously, developing professional knowledge of the latest practices. This benefit was highlighted specifically by training providers in the construction and health and social care sectors, but is in reality pertinent to all the case studies. Another five providers specifically pointed to the impact constant exposure to the workplace has for their staff, minimising the need for teachers to take time out of the workplace to attend training.

Perhaps the most persuasive factor is the confidence providers are given that the qualification is equipping learners with the skills and knowledge required by employers, or as two providers explained:

“...reassurance through employer feedback that employers are getting what they need from learners on the course.”

Training provider

“ The knowledge that what we are delivering is getting our young people jobs, helping the region, and helping our communities.”

Training provider

As with the feedback from employers, training providers recognise the importance of this as a driver, when it comes to reflecting on their reasons for involving employers in qualifications delivery and assessment. For some, it is clearly a requirement of the qualification, mandated in the specification, but for others it was more a desire to ‘raise the bar’ and a commitment to excellence. The situation is a ‘win/win’ for these training providers, who admit that, through this process, the organisation benefits from an enhanced reputation, which in turn attracts more learners.

A range of additional benefits were identified through the research which can be summarised as follows:

- access to resources such as employer facilities and expertise;
- enhancements to existing employer links;
- tapping into the ‘zeitgeist’ for innovative workforce development;
- reinforcing industry standards into everyday learning;
- keeping centre staff up-to-date on industry practices and providing development opportunities;
- integrating academic and practical learning;
- enhancing employability of learners;
- encouraging ‘non-traditional’ applicants who bring different experiences to their own studies and to the learning environment;
- making courses more enjoyable and relevant to work; and,

- motivating and enthusing learners.

## 4.4 Inhibitors to engagement

Successful relationships with employers are consistently reported by training providers as being founded primarily on good, regular and sustained communication, whether by e-mail, telephone or face to face. Nonetheless, a wide range of barriers are encountered by both employers and training providers in maintaining employer involvement.

It should be noted that those employers spoken with for this research are already 'engaged'; i.e. they are already motivated and actively assist with design, delivery and assessment of qualifications relevant to their sector. They are therefore conversant with the requirements and commitments of working with one or more (and, in fact, often many) providers. Therefore, very little reference was made by employers during this research to the fact that the responsibility and onus for making the link with employers should rest more with providers whose role essentially is to provide high quality training in any given vocational area.

### Resource/Time pressures – training providers

For providers, developing and maintaining workable and productive industry links is resource intensive. While they recognise the value of an on-going relationship with employers they have multiple primary time and resource burdens to manage. This can also have an impact on a centre's ability to forge links with new employers. Employer relationships also require careful monitoring and fostering, which is frequently time consuming, making adequate contact difficult for centres to maintain.

“ Limitations on time mean it is not always possible to secure the involvement of additional employers.”

Training provider

### Resource/Time pressures – employers

Employers, are under pressure to maintain lean business practices, win/gain work to ensure profits and their livelihoods in highly competitive markets. Although case study

employers are keen to engage in qualification delivery and assessment, their immediate priority is the viability of their business. This can mean that there are times when employers struggle to find both time and people to contribute to qualification design, assessment and learner development.

### **Staff capacity – training providers**

Centre staff have many burdens upon their time which are added to if there are staff shortages, either short or long term, that require them to focus away from employer relationships. This can be exacerbated during busy times of the year, both due to the cycle of the academic year and where an occupation is affected by seasonality.

Some examples are:

- ensuring sufficient staff capacity to cover employer visits and to complete the necessary paperwork to fulfil Health and Safety requirements; and,
- allocating sufficient training provider staff with the appropriate vocational background and expertise for a sector subject to carry out assessments.

In one other case study example, in which qualification design and development was led by an employer – who also instigated the relationship with the provider community – one training provider was unable to continue to support the collaboration due to insufficient resources.

### **Staff capacity – employers**

Equally this is an issue for employers, particularly for those sectors where SMEs are a dominant feature.

Some examples of issues that arise are:

- ensuring line managers (involved in assessment) are both competent and confident to undertake the delivery and assessment tasks; and,
- allocating staff a suitable time-off rota to help carry out assessments.

### **Staff turnover – employers and training providers**

Staff turnover is a pertinent issue from both the employer and the training provider perspective. In the face of cuts to funding, a small number of training providers have pointed anecdotally to the knock-on impact of staff redundancies. This creates obvious

challenges in ensuring sufficient staff to monitor work placements and maintain the necessary level of ongoing contact with their employer networks.

Some sectors are characterised by a relatively high proportion of transient workers, which can also inhibit employer-provider relationships; this point is particularly pertinent, given the informal nature of most of these relationships.

“The college staff tend to build up working relationships with individuals in local companies, however this can prove challenging because those working in the industry typically only remain with an employer for a few years before moving on.”

Training provider

### **Flexibility of Working – training providers**

Cover can be difficult for colleges and some private training providers to arrange and provide where course delivery takes place within ‘normal working hours’ but work placements can be undertaken outside the usual timetable.

This requires flexibility from provider staff to monitor learners when they may be working in sectors where shift work is common, or where the typical working pattern covers evenings and weekends.

### **Flexibility of Working – employers**

Providing cover for staff that may be involved in delivery or assessment activities is also an issue for employers. Staff working shifts or flexible hours find that maintaining a regular communications pattern with training providers can be difficult.

### **Commitment and preconceptions**

In new relationships between a centre and an employer such a scenario can prove difficult in the early days. In those instances where the sector does not have a long tradition of vocational learning both parties have to work hard to gain the respect of each other.

Matching the investment of time and commitment to expectations around qualified professionals takes time to balance out. For employers, as the benefits are not always immediate or direct it can take time to recognise the value to their business of being

involved with vocational provision. This is of particular resonance in sectors that have traditionally trained entrants through academic pathways.

Providers can also face challenges in securing engagement from employers who may view their involvement – especially if they associate this with a fairly narrow type of involvement such as work experience – as creating a burden. Two training providers mentioned that some employers view young people in the workplace as a burden, requiring a significant time commitment for supervision.

### **Motivating and enthusing all staff**

Two employers said that sometimes they can face some resistance from existing staff asked to mentor or monitor the development of learners, as they feel this detracts from their own occupational development and their ability to perform their own duties.

### **Motivating and enthusing learners**

Similarly, two case study training provider centres reported that they have had to overcome a certain amount of reticence from learners who may feel embarrassed or unsure about having first hand employer contact. This is most often where learners are completely new to an industry sector or to the world of work.

### **Accessibility**

For some learners, travel costs can be a barrier to accessing work experience. Where employer premises are a long way from the centre, learners can find it difficult to find and fund appropriate transport to get them where they need to be at the appropriate time.

## 5. Mandating employer involvement

### Key findings

- The stipulation of the qualifications in these sample case studies as either recommended or mandated, in terms of employer involvement, was set by the AO in all cases.
- In discussion with the sample of Awarding Organisations the matter of definitions and interpretation emerges regarding the use and understanding of the terms recommended and mandatory. It is not always a clear cut case as to how this transpires or is manifested.
- The sample of 20 case study qualifications examined for this research includes 13 examples of mandated employer involvement, the remainder being recommended.
- Mandatory involvement ranges from employment of the learner, work placements to tutoring teams which include employees with industry qualifications or specialisms. It does not always follow that where employer involvement in the qualification is mandated that work experience is the mandatory element.
- Where there is mandatory involvement of employers, there are often numerous ways in delivery or assessment for employers to become involved; examples include assessment of written and practical coursework, assessment of the work placement, expert witness and testimony, among others.
- The seven case studies that recommend employer involvement also provide many opportunities and examples for employers to get involved. Where employer involvement is set out as 'essential' in the specification for delivery or assessment this is related to those units which are identified as optional in the qualification structure.
- Those thirteen that describe mandated employer involvement often use a mixture of 'required' and 'recommended' phrases in their description of the qualification requirements. The mandatory aspect is usually made clear however in the specification in relation to those units which must be completed to achieve the qualification.

## 5.1 Mandatory employer involvement

**Table 3 Case studies with mandated employer involvement.**

Mandated Employer Involvement	
Qualification title	Delivery/ Assessment requirement
Pearson Level 3 National Certificate in Children's Play, Learning and Development	Placements must be available to meet the requirements for age ranges and settings as set out in the specification. Each establishment agrees an assessment of their setting known as a 'Vetting Assessment'. Following this, each setting is contacted by the Placement Co-ordinators in writing asking them to agree to support a named learner, their reply requires a signature which forms an informal contract.
City & Guilds Level 3 Diploma in Forestry and Arboriculture (QCF)	The employer is involved in formal assessment of the work placement unit. This is a graded unit, determined both by the learner's punctuality and their work assessment. The employer is further engaged through providing informal feedback to the college on the learner's progress.
Highfield Awarding Body for Compliance Level 2 Diploma in Workbased Horticulture (QCF)	The employer provides work experience and placements, and coaches and mentors the learners. Classroom training is delivered in the depot classroom.
City and Guilds Level 3 Diploma in Veterinary Nursing (QCF)	Learners are required to achieve a minimum overall period of training of 94 weeks (3290 hours) of which 60 weeks (2100 hours) are practical training within an approved veterinary nursing training practice. Employers are involved in the delivery and assessment of this qualification in a number of ways including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expert witness/testimony</li> <li>• Coaching/mentoring</li> <li>• Work experience/placements</li> <li>• As assessors/on assessment teams (e.g. marking/moderating)</li> </ul>



Mandated Employer Involvement	
City and Guilds Level 3 Diploma in Countryside Management (QCF)	A work placement is a mandatory component of the course, which must be of a minimum of 150 hours, or four weeks on each year of the two year course. The employer is involved in formal assessment of the work placement unit, which is a graded unit, determined both by the learner's punctuality and work assessment.
ABC Level 4 Diploma in Technical Textiles and Apparel (QCF)	Delivery and assessment occurring within the workplace – all learners are required to be employed. Assessment must take place in the workplace for the units to be linked to competence.
Foundation Degree in Dairy Technology	Learners study dairy theory, science and practical skills, with the remainder of the time spent “hands on” in the dairy industry following a structured work and training programme with an employer. The regular contact with the employer ensures that the learners' theoretical knowledge is used during their work period. Employers also provide learners with a mentor.
City and Guilds Level 2 Diploma in Aviation Operations on the Ground (QCF)	The employer delivers the qualification to their own employees and they also assess the qualification. The qualification is also separately delivered by colleges, and the employer in this case provides CPD, materials and training opportunities for college staff.
NOCN Level 2 NVQ Diploma in Steelfixing (QCF)	Employers were at the heart of the design of this qualification, and all technical exercises involved in the Diploma were created and developed by employers and college tutors. A portion of the qualification delivery is at the employer's own supplier's factory and utilises knowledge of the business' technical experts who are considered to be the best at delivering the practical content of the qualification.
TLM Level 3 Certificate in Open Systems Computing	It is a mandatory requirement to involve employers in the assessment process which can be either through the work experience in a placement in a

Mandated Employer Involvement	
	company or specific assessment criteria, such as: presenting proposals to critical experts; testing code involving third parties; providing regular updates on progress to a mentor; or making a final presentation to a critical audience.
1st4sport Level 2 NVQ Certificate in Activity Leadership (QCF)	Learners must be employed and evidence must be authenticated by the employer. Workplace observations are assessed by the learner's line manager against required criteria.
CYQ Level 4 Certificate in Weight Management for Individuals with Obesity, Diabetes Mellitus and/or Metabolic Syndrome	<p>Tutoring teams must include an NHS clinical or healthcare specialist from a relevant specialism (such as a physiotherapist or nurse specialist).</p> <p>The tutor team must also include a Register of Exercise Professionals (REPS) registered exercise instructor with a minimum of six months' relevant experience, qualified to at least level 3 in exercise referral and who holds or is working towards a level 4 qualification in the specialist area. This individual must be present throughout the direct delivery of contact time.</p>
National College for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) Level 3 Diploma in Journalism (QCF)	Employer involvement is mandatory in the delivery of the Diploma, and involves assessment of written and practical coursework by qualified journalist trainers and practitioners. Industry practitioners are heavily involved in setting and marking NCTJ examinations designed to meet industry standards and ensure learners can apply their skills to 'real-world' scenarios.

## 5.2 Recommended employer involvement

The table below summarises the seven case studies where employer involvement is recommended.

**Table 4 Case studies where employer involvement is recommended**

Recommended Employer Involvement	
Qualification title	Delivery/Assessment requirements
City & Guilds Level 3 Principal Learning in Construction and the Built Environment	Incorporation of a realistic working environment in the delivery is encouraged – 50% of the course involves applied learning.
Pearson Pre-apprenticeship Level 2 Programme of Study (including BTEC) in IT	The programme encourages employer involvement through a range of activities such as work experience or setting projects, and by the provider and employers working closely together through mentoring and support.
VTCT Level 2 Diploma in Women's Hairdressing	Employer engagement is actively encouraged through centre support mechanisms, and this involves employer input in the delivery of training as well as the assessment of learners.
VTCT Level 2 Diploma in Beauty Therapy Studies	Employer involvement in delivery and assessment is actively encouraged, although not mandatory.
City & Guilds Level 2 Diploma in Professional Cookery	Placements involving access to the public are strongly recommended and employer guest-speakers are encouraged, but are not mandatory.
Pearson BTEC Level 3 Extended Diploma in Music Technology	The use of practical activities during work experience and course delivery is encouraged, particularly for part-time learners.
CACHE Level 3 Diploma in Health and Social Care (Adults) for England	Learners are ideally required to be in employment during the delivery of the Diploma. Witness evidence from employers can be used for assessment.

## 6. Conclusions and considerations in specifying employer involvement in qualifications delivery and assessment

Recent government-commissioned consultations<sup>26</sup> and reports<sup>27</sup> pertaining to the reform for vocational qualifications set the context for debate about the levels of, and requirements for, employer involvement.

This research investigated how employers are currently involved in the delivery and assessment of vocational qualifications: the purpose being to further the Department for Education's understanding of this level of involvement and to inform the Department's development of the new Tech Level qualifications (where employer involvement is required).

As part of the research, other relevant literature<sup>28</sup> was examined to establish other methods and models of employer involvement. Most of the examples identified are based on the workbased learning models of apprenticeships and NVQs. Studio Schools, a relatively new education concept displaying a level of engagement between schools and employers, provides further examples which, according to the Schools Trust, include mentoring, setting projects, providing master classes – most of which are relevant, and therefore, transferable from that model to other vocational contexts.

This research sought to identify examples of good practice of employer involvement.

Following, prompt responses from AOs nominating a total of just under 70 qualifications, a small sample of 20 case studies meeting a set of agreed criteria (including a minimum for guided learning hours) was established. These cover 12 AOs, 14 sector subject areas across qualifications at levels 2, 3 and 4, and where, in the main, the majority of learning takes place in the classroom.

From a detailed set of 46 interviews with 16 staff in 12 AOs, 11 employers and 19 providers of the small sample of 20 case studies, it has been possible to identify a number of pertinent factors:

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<sup>26</sup> For example - Department for Education, *Consultation on the reform of Level 3 Vocational Qualifications for 16-19 year olds*, Government response, July 2013

<sup>27</sup> For example - Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning (CAVTL), *It's about work...Excellent adult vocational teaching and learning*, March 2013, and the *Review of Adult Vocational Qualifications* headed up Nigel Whitehead, November 2013.

<sup>28</sup> See section headed References which points to the full range of literature reviewed as part of the research.

- Work experience/placements are the most common feature of these case studies; 10 of the case studies *recommend* work experience and a further 10 stipulate it is a requirement of the qualification.
- Employers providing work experience/placements also voluntarily get involved in other delivery-enriching activities, examples include coaching and mentoring of learners or providing links for learners to customers/clients.
- Prevalent too, are many examples of employer engagement – such as hosting visits by learners/providers as in the Level 2 Diploma in Aviation Operations on the Ground, or providing premises and facilities as in the Level 3 Extended Diploma in Music Technology.
- Several examples – such as for the Level 2 Diploma in Professional Cookery or the NCTJ Level 3 Diploma in Journalism - illustrate employers involvement in assessment activities, such as setting or marking assessments and second marking of synoptic tests.
- Seven of the case studies refer to employers' assessing learners' practise in the workplace, and 11 mention observations and witness testimony as other examples of employer activity in assessment.
- It is noted that design, delivery and assessment are rarely mutually exclusive activities and, as such, it is not always possible for them to be cleanly segregated from one another.

Over half of the 19 providers interviewed say that established networks with employers are critical; and, that, alongside a history of workbased learning in a sector, tend to help relationships with employers be sustainable over a period of time.

Employers are quick to point to a large range of benefits for the learners, and recognise that there are business benefits for themselves and/or their sector. Indirect or longer term benefits include increasing diversity in a sector, as described as being needed in the ICT and Journalism sectors, as well as improvements in work-readiness by young people. The opportunity to influence the quality and content of qualifications is a major motivating factor.

References to more direct or immediate benefits include a ready-made /accessible channel for recruitment, improving the capabilities and confidence in existing employer staff through coaching and mentoring activities and a unique and up-to-date insight to make sure provision is what employers need it to be.

Without doubt, there are inhibitors to engagement with, and involvement by, employers in qualifications delivery and assessment from both sides. However, it is important to note that this research interacted with employers and providers already engaged with qualifications that display a number of elements of involvement by employers.

Concerns listed by providers tend to focus more on the process of involving employers and sustaining the relationship rather than the actual implementation of delivery or assessment activities. From the providers point of view finding sufficient resources to develop and sustain the relationships with employers, particularly where these are relatively newly formed is a key issue. Staff turnover at businesses as well as (a lack of) senior buy-in are fairly common challenges that providers say they face.

Equally, employers are able to point to worries over time, resources, staff capacity, all of which are doubly difficult for small to medium-sized businesses. Additionally, such challenges include staff turnover and maintaining the commitment and knowledge of the requirements of the qualifications.

As mentioned above, this research interacted with employers and providers already engaged with qualifications in a number of ways. Not all concerns or challenges are covered in this research therefore. That requires looking outside of this research to other reports such as the review conducted by Nigel Whitehead (commissioner at UKCES) on adult vocational qualifications reform, which reported in November 2013. He commented: *“The current regulated system does not encourage employer ownership of vocational qualifications. Unlike in mainland Europe, there is not the history across all sectors of employers being involved in vocational qualifications’*. He also explained that *‘at a local level, training providers have very little discretion to negotiate the curriculum directly with employers because of the central prescription of the current offer’*<sup>29</sup>.

In considering all of these findings within, and external to, this research there are a number of considerations that could influence the need or requirement to stipulate employer involvement in vocational qualifications, particularly for the Tech Levels. These are set out in the next section.

## **6.1 Considerations in specifying employer involvement in qualification delivery and assessment**

Considerations focus on two specific research questions:

1. What factors currently drive employer involvement in the delivery and assessment of vocational qualifications, and how?
2. What could DfE require of qualification specifications that would, in turn, require employer involvement in the delivery and assessment of vocational qualifications?

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<sup>29</sup> Page 19, Nigel Whitehead, *Review of Adult Vocational Qualifications*, November 2013

The landscape of employer involvement in vocational qualifications is extremely complex on a number of levels. Vocational education and training takes many forms and can be conducted in schools and colleges, at universities, in employer-funded training schools, by private companies, and in the workplace itself.

Historically, employers have always been involved to a degree in vocational education and training. Due to the paucity of state-funded provision during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries most larger employers established training schools or even funded separate colleges to train their people. Young people were employed directly from school and either trained in-house or required to attend night-schools to acquire the appropriate skills.

For smaller employers the apprenticeship system worked reasonably well and employees attended night schools or employers managed to acquire enough trained staff from the larger employers to keep their companies going.

A number of factors have changed the landscape considerably over the past fifty years - primarily the increased sophistication in skill needs (higher level maths requirements, computer skills, enhanced literacy needs, other technological advances, significantly increased Government involvement, and so on, as well as increased skill demands from the sectors and industries that make up the modern UK economy).

Governments have fought a continuing battle to help industry get the skilled people it needs, at first supporting qualifications and institutions (ONC/D, HNC/D and Polytechnics for example), then attempting to simplify and rationalise the whole qualifications system with the introduction of NVQs following the Oscar de Ville Report<sup>30</sup>, and much more recently, doing their best to support a more employer-led or centred approach seeking to ensure that qualifications and skills are relevant and appropriate to employers' needs and that they provide the basis for fulfilling careers for employees.

It has proved an extremely difficult task. Different sectors, different regions and areas, different sub-sectors, different sizes of company, all have different needs and different capabilities when it comes to involvement in education and training. To make matters worse, there is a national issue with both basic literacy and numeracy (English and mathematics) and with more "advanced" STEM skills (i.e. at levels 3 upwards).

There is also the matter of employer capability which is usually, although not always, associated with size.

Involving employers in the design, delivery and assessment of vocational qualifications may not work with, therefore, a "one-size fits all" approach.

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<sup>30</sup> De Ville, O. (1986), *The Review of Vocational Qualifications in England and Wales*, MSC/DES (London, HMSO).

Whether involvement of employers in the delivery and assessment of vocational qualifications is to be mandated or recommended, this research has found that there are a number of supporting actions and considerations which need to be addressed by awarding organisations, training providers and employers themselves.

These are discussed below under the following broad headings:

- definitions and terminology;
- compatibility of training with the employment context;
- mutually supportive relationships;
- buy-in from senior management;
- commitment of trusted and knowledgeable staff;
- flexibility (from both the centre and employer perspective);
- employer engagement and brokerage;
- quality of delivery and assessment; and,
- burden on employers.

As we have already noted in the report, “engaging” employers in the education and training process is, perhaps, not the same thing as “involving” them.

In many official reports the first (employer engagement) is often interpreted to relate to the process of consultation and data gathering, whereas the latter comprises active participation in such things as design, implementation, assessment, etc. What is clear is that the terms are often used, particularly in official reports, interchangeably and therefore warrant clear, rational and definitions that exhibit an important element of flexibility.

This raises an important consideration of definitions and interpretations touched on in the report. Across the interviews with case study providers and employers it was evident that each had slightly different interpretations of ‘employer involvement’. So, for example the offer of premises, facilities or equipment, may quite understandably be regarded in employers’ eyes as a significant contribution. Access to such items takes time and trouble to set up, organise and control, and in industries such as manufacturing or construction or sectors such as music technology this is of fundamental importance.

Similarly, clarity seems to be required for the specific terms ‘recommended’ or ‘mandated’ or even ‘required’ regarding employer involvement in Tech Level qualifications. The research identified at least four examples of wording in qualification specifications that imply an element of mandatory requirements - for example through the use of ‘must’ or ‘essential’ - and yet the AO preferred to classify employer involvement in the qualification as recommended. One reason given relates to the lack of any formal agreement between



the AO and employers. This suggests the distinction between mandatory and recommended is not always as clear cut as it may first appear.

### **Compatibility of training with the employment context**

Almost all of the case study centres and employers we spoke to, acknowledged that, to maximise the effectiveness of a delivery partnership, there has to be a match between the employer's day to day requirements and priorities and the training that is delivered within the centre.

This research has found that employers, providers and learners all derive multiple benefits from employer involvement, but that involvement must be well-planned and targeted appropriately in support of defined learning outcomes if it is to add value.

The point is supported by the Aiming University Learning @ Work project which aimed to create a strategic shift within higher education institutions towards work-related learning (WRL) as a means of enhancing learners' long term employability. One of the resulting reports (Bell et al. 2010) found:

“There is a demand from learners for WRL to be embedded in the undergraduate curriculum. It should be relevant to the degree course or programme, accredited, well structured, and offered throughout the whole degree programme to ensure incremental development and progression of more complex learning”<sup>31</sup>.

As well as compatibility between training content and the employment context, classroom learning must incorporate or reflect in some way the resources, facilities and technologies that the learner will be exposed to in the workplace. This is especially pertinent in sectors involving a high degree of technology (advanced manufacturing, engineering, software or hardware, etc), and where the vocational value of the programme lies in equipping the learner with the practical skills to use technology.

The report, “*It’s about work...Excellent adult vocational teaching and learning*” (CAVTL 2013) sets out four characteristics on which excellent programmes of adult vocational teaching and learning depend, one of these being “access to industry-standard facilities

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<sup>31</sup> Bell, I. et al. (2010), *Pedagogy, Policy and Practice in the Provision of Work-Related Learning for Undergraduates*. Aiming University Learning @ Work.

and resources reflecting the ways in which technology is transforming work;<sup>32</sup>. But this statement needs to be balanced against practical considerations, providers need to be mindful of how they will ensure that the curriculum they are teaching is relevant to working practices.

The current research has highlighted, through the case studies, a number of examples of how workplace opportunities – notably work experience, or the provision of learning space within the employers' premises – have been carefully selected to match the delivery of specific learning outcomes or units.

- In the example of the delivery of the BTEC Level 3 Extended Diploma in Music Technology, learners are given access to the latest equipment through employer involvement. In fast-paced industries, in which technology soon become obsolete, exposure to current industry technology is of vital importance to learners' learning.
- For the City and Guilds Level 2 Diploma in Aviation Operations on the Ground, the employer ensures that learners visiting their premises as part of college provision are exposed to realistic learning activities that might well have less value if taught or simulated in a college environment.
- In the NCTJ Diploma in Journalism, work experience is used as an opportunity for learners to gather stories for their portfolio; the production of 10 articles, or broadcast packages, is a requirement of one of the mandatory units.

Two key elements appear from the research to be important in ensuring compatibility between learning programmes and the world of work:

- flexibility on the part of the training provider (e.g. in recognition of the working practices of the employer), and;
- maintaining open lines of communication between employers and training providers to coordinate delivery.

One mechanism for achieving ongoing dialogue and continuing engagement with employers is that of inviting their input into the development and maintenance of qualifications and learning programmes.

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<sup>32</sup> Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning (CAVTL), *It's about work...Excellent adult vocational teaching and learning*, March 2013, p. 9

Compatibility is vital and covers not only the practical elements of the qualifications but the knowledge input: i.e. it is important that both provider and employer fully understand the base of knowledge and up-to-date practice which underpin the elements of the qualification.

## **Mutually supportive relationships**

Both the centre and the employer must recognise the benefits of employer engagement in qualifications and be committed to work together to support the development of learners, sharing responsibility for developing and maintaining the working relationship.

However, time constraints, commercial issues, and the need for both parties to fully understand what may well be an entirely different operational context mean that these relationships take a long time and a lot of effort to establish and can be very fragile. The positive impacts delivered through employer involvement can be quickly lost if either the employer or centre loses their commitment to collective goals. A lack of continuity in personnel, for example, can damage a new or thinly-based relationship.

The Ofsted research carried out in 2010 found the strength of relationships between providers and employers to be a key indicator of success:

“... outstanding providers have productive and mutually supportive relationships with a range of employers as a means of ensuring high-quality training. Employers [who] work closely with providers’ staff feel part of the training process and contribute meaningfully to its planning and management at all stages.”<sup>33</sup>.

The importance of strong connections was also highlighted in the CAVTL report, which consistently found the best provision to be collaborative in nature. The report dubbed this form of collaboration a ‘two-way street’ between providers and employers<sup>34</sup>.

Both parties must be able to identify a benefit from the collaboration and employer involvement. This research has identified a wide range of benefits acknowledged by

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<sup>33</sup> Ofsted (2012) *Twelve outstanding providers of work-based learning*

<sup>34</sup> Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning (CAVTL), *It’s about work...Excellent adult vocational teaching and learning*, March 2013, p. 4

training providers and employers, many of which also act as powerful drivers of engagement.

In some cases, employers are able to derive a tangible benefit – such as the use of the provider's facilities – but they also recognise the 'two-way street'. The opportunity for each to learn from the other is considered a valuable outcome of an employer's involvement in qualifications delivery and assessment.

Each party must have consideration for the other's needs and the context in which they work. As one employer pointed out, employers operate in a commercial world and make commercial decisions. These may not always be compatible with the way that the training provider operates but must be considered when engaging with them. Equally, employers need to be aware that training provider staff may not have a full appreciation of the commercial environment.

### **Buy-in from senior management**

It was clear from the research that not all providers have dedicated staff members responsible for employer liaison, for example maintaining relationships and troubleshooting any issues that occur. For centres which do have such staff, valuable employer relationships are looked after through regular contact and support.

However, not all of those responsible for employer relationships have industry or sector specific knowledge. Some have overall responsibility for employer relationships for an entire school or college and so staff in charge of the delivery of sector specific provision are also required to keep up regular employer contact to ensure that provision matches industry requirement.

Although this research has found relationships between employer and training provider to be based mainly on individuals, and maintained primarily through the commitment of those people, there must also be buy-in at a senior level in order for the relationship to be successful over the longer term.

Many of the relationships described by participants in this research were instigated by individuals, with approval sought from senior management after the relationship was established. This 'bottom-up' approach appears to work well in engaging SMEs where interactions have been described as emanating from recommendations from a friend-of-a-friend, rather than in response, for example, to formal approaches by dedicated staff.

The recent UKCES report on adult vocational qualifications takes this need a step further by proposing a top-down approach as the most effective mechanism for companies of all sizes<sup>35</sup>.

### **Commitment of trusted and knowledgeable staff**

Employer involvement is felt by both centres and employers to work best when both parties are confident in the capability and commitment of the other's staff. Relationships built over time are testament to the trust that employers' place in a particular centre and a particular qualification. Equally, centres that repeatedly partner with the same employers, cohort after cohort, demonstrate their trust in the commitment and professionalism of those employers to deliver high quality provision.

In partnering to deliver good quality provision, both parties need to commit to a workable arrangement, perhaps by adopting a simple service level agreement (see below).

### **Flexibility (from all perspectives)**

Flexibility is also important in terms of the different nuances of sector needs and characteristics. An example of this is as one case study participant pointed out - whereas on the one hand recommended employer involvement gives validity to the course as learners are able to see the standard of training they would be given in the industry and they will understand the industry and its needs better, but on the other industry is spending less on training now because new entrants are better equipped going into it thanks to qualifications like this one.

" I think to make employer involvement mandatory would be impractical especially for colleges that do not have local access to as many employers as those based in larger cities."

Training provider

Many companies today operate 24/7, a working day which is relatively rare for providers and centres. The research has shown that case study centres can offer evening provision to fit in with employers' business requirements, but the economic implications of providers operating outside their normal teaching must be taken into account.

Such an arrangement will require flexibility on both sides and be sustainable for the partnership to work. There should also be recognition of what learners are able to

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<sup>35</sup> N. Whitehead -commissioner of UKCES. *Review of Adult Vocational Qualifications in England*, 2013

manage in terms of 'out of hours commitment'. In many cases this is not a major hurdle because learners are made aware of the nuances and requirements of the sector they wish to work within from the outset of training.

The research was able to identify very few case study centres which have a written contract or Memorandum of Understanding with an employer. It is commonly felt that informal involvement with employers offers the necessary degree of flexibility. In fast-paced industry sectors flexibility is valued because it means that when employers are particularly busy they are able either to temporarily lessen their hands-on involvement with learners or perhaps draw upon learners to help deal with the surge in work load.

Flexibility is also beneficial in industries in which employers' workload is determined by the seasons and weather conditions (eg agriculture, forestry, and fishing). From the other perspective centres value flexibility during exam times or academic holiday periods. The Ofsted research found that "being responsive and taking advantage of opportunities for assessment in the workplace at short notice"<sup>36</sup> was a common feature of best practice.

This is particularly relevant in the case of interactions with SMEs which may require greater support from the training provider than their larger counterparts.

The literature warns against counting on the goodwill engendered through personal contacts. The University of Leicester, for example, in its guide for working with employers in developing work-related learning programmes, asks "would the partnership survive if a key member of staff left?"<sup>37</sup>. Establishing formal agreements with partners is listed as one of the main actions in their guide.

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<sup>36</sup> Ofsted (2012) *Twelve outstanding providers of work-based learning*

<sup>37</sup> Benyon, J. McKee, B. Morris, K. *Dos and Don'ts for Working with Employers and Developing Successful Foundation Degrees and other Work-related, Accredited Higher Education Programmes, Blueprint for Success, Colleges* – University of Leicester Network, 2010

“The main [challenge] is that members are trying to innovate at the cutting edge of technology and for small businesses one person out can be 50% of the skilled work force. We are confident we can overcome these [issues] but it requires flexible approaches to problems that are not well defined. This is why we do not think it is appropriate to start signing formal contracts.”

Employer representative body

All the case study centres in this research view the engagement of employers in the delivery and assessment of qualifications (where possible) as fundamental to providing high quality training provision. All have well developed employer links, perhaps through initial qualification design. Providing the opportunity for employers also to be part of the delivery and assessment of programmes and have a hand in shaping the future development of skills within their industry sector, further empowers the relationship.

This research has continually found personal relationships to be at the core of successful employer involvement.

“the level of commitment of the employer organisation [itself] can be an unknown, but the helpfulness and enthusiasm of the individual is what is important.”

Training provider

The Pearson Level 3 Diploma in Children’s Play, Learning and Development, illustrates that formalising relationships is possible without the need for a ‘contract’ per se. For this qualification the issue is resolved through an employer’s written commitment to support a named learner. The provider response is also relatively informal in that it simply requires a signature.

One of the common features of best practice in engaging employers described by the Ofsted report is “*ensuring the continuity of the provider’s staff who are working with learners and employers, therefore building strong working relationships*”<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> Ofsted (2012) *Twelve outstanding providers of work-based learning*

However, as this research has found, a good relationship can be put in jeopardy very quickly by relatively small changes - for example the loss by either the employer or the provider of one member of staff. Industries such as retail or hospitality, where high staff turnover is typical, are particularly exposed to this type of risk.

Flexibility and simple formalisation are important but, as the University of Leicester points out, a range of methods should be used to keep in touch and to keep the relationship solid. Case study employers confirm the fact that a combination of face to face meetings, telephone and e-mail communication helps them to maintain their relationship with the provider.

### **Employer engagement and brokerage**

Most employers agree that investing time in taking part in the design, delivery and assessment of industry-specific qualifications is beneficial. However, there are challenges that face SMEs in particular which make it difficult for them to play an active part. This research has found some anecdotal evidence suggesting that SMEs are more likely to take part in a programme of delivery if there are other employers, in particular larger branded companies, involved. Evidence from a small number of SMEs showed that they gain confidence from the involvement of a larger sector company but also that they value the possibility of being able to contact that company and discuss employer-centred issues around the qualification.

Their willingness and ability to engage is also influenced by their relationship with the centre and the type and level of involvement required of them. In the hair and beauty industry, for example, where there is a tradition of “trainee workers”, employers are open to being involved in the delivery of training through workplace experience and assessment via observation and feedback.

All case study centres agreed that engaging with employers in the first instance can be difficult. Exceptions to this occur where a qualification has been developed in partnership with a particular employer (for example in the case of the Diploma in Work-based Horticulture); where an awarding organisation is longstanding and held in high industry regard (for example NCTJ), where the qualification provides training to an industry sector where there is little alternative provision (for example Reaseheath), and where there is an established network of sector employers (for example in the case of the Open Systems Computing Certificate).

One training provider observed that the value of employer involvement needs to sometimes be sold to the learner as well as a potential employer:



“Learner expectations need to be balanced with what is practical in the workplace and this means ensuring that learners do not feel exploited when undertaking their work placements”

Training provider

It must be pointed out, however, that there is no reliable evidence of such “exploitation”. The word is difficult to define in this context and feedback to centres tends to be subjective and variable (i.e. centres can receive very different feedback on the same employer from different trainees).

Two contributors to this research (one College and one employer representative body) suggested that employers should make some form of financial contribution in exchange for receiving additional ‘labour’. However, employers may well already perceive the provision of their time in supervising learners, completing supporting paperwork, liaising with the centre, and so on, as an in-kind contribution.

The research has found there to be fairly limited involvement of SMEs in delivery and assessment. Informal conversations with awarding organisations suggest this to be an area of particular challenge. Small companies can struggle to release staff to participate in learning and development activities – whether as a learner, or as a participator, in delivery or assessment. Smaller employers also have considerably less resources to oversee such activities as assessment.

The lack of business networks or forums has been highlighted by many participants as a challenge when seeking to engage with small businesses<sup>39</sup>.

The government response to the consultation on the reform of Level 3 Vocational Qualifications suggests that employer organisations such as Chambers of Commerce and the Federation of Small Business could be involved in the development of new “time-efficient” ways of engaging and involving employers<sup>40</sup>.

This research has found such examples to be effective in stimulating industry interaction:

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<sup>39</sup> For example as mentioned by City and Guilds with respect to the C&G Level 3 Diploma in Forestry and Arboriculture; and the C&G Level 3 Diploma in Countryside Management

<sup>40</sup> Government response to the *Level 3 Vocational Qualification Reform Consultation* (2013): page 10

- A trade association for open source software companies, which has worked in partnership with The Learning Machine<sup>41</sup> to develop a new Level 3 Certificate, is an example of a collaborative approach between companies (mainly SMEs) sharing business principles and collaborating on projects.
- The employer working in partnership with ABC Awards to develop a new Level 4 Diploma in Technical Textiles, is an example of where an industry network is present and which has facilitated the involvement of SMEs.

In the construction sector several case study centres reported challenges in securing the involvement of smaller employers. Where construction employers are involved in public sector works, social clauses in contracts can stipulate a requirement for the company to become involved with education and training in the local area (eg through apprenticeships). However, anecdotal evidence suggests such obligations can be very difficult to enforce and do not always come to fruition.

It is important that both employers and centres are realistic about the level of involvement that is feasible for the employer. Case study participants have stressed that it is vital to determine at an early stage what can and cannot be done. It is common, for example, for an employer who is not able to dedicate a great deal of time but wishes to be involved in the delivery and assessment of the qualification to provide the services of a “visiting expert”. In this way the employer is able to deliver talks, help out in lesson time or where feasible give a demonstration of their work to allow learners to gain experience of job specific skills in action.

“Running small business enterprises is difficult in the current economic climate and so we would not expect volunteers to commit specific time when their circumstances can change”

Employer representative body

For this reason, training providers tend to maintain a network of employers that they can call upon to provide workplace opportunities or assessment to learners, or request other forms of involvement from employers.

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<sup>41</sup> The Learning Machine Ltd - an Ofqual registered awarding body.

One awarding organisation recently set up a number of industry and employer forums to involve employers in the design, development, delivery and assessment of vocational qualifications.

## **Quality of delivery and assessment**

The literature reviewed for this research illustrates that the quality of delivery and assessment is an important consideration when involving employers with little or no previous experience of teaching or assessing.

Research carried out on behalf of the Scottish Qualifications Authority in 2011 into workplace learning and assessment in Higher National Qualifications found that, while learners were unanimous that they would like to see a greater proportion of workplace learning and assessment, a large proportion of employers and providers cited issues regarding commercial burdens for employers and provider capacity. Initiatives for encouraging greater employer interaction were welcomed with the strong caveat that this should not compromise the quality of the offer<sup>42</sup>.

The issue of employer competence in being able to sufficiently meet delivery and assessment obligations is of critical importance in this context and may require continual support from the training provider.

Bell, Naven and Berrie (2010) pointed out some possible limitations of employer involvement in observations of learners, stating that employers are not usually trained assessors. However this comment must be set against the fact that employers undertake complex evaluations of staff, customers and products as regular practice<sup>43</sup>.

Such concerns were evidenced in responses to the Government consultation on the reform of Level 3 Vocational Qualifications. A number of training providers in that consultation suggested that employer involvement with assessments could result in inconsistency in awarding qualifications and grades<sup>44</sup>. This point could, however, equally be applied to the centres themselves. 'Teach Too'<sup>45</sup> is recommended in the CAVTL report as a mechanism for encouraging experienced industry professionals to become involved in teaching.

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<sup>42</sup> Pye Tait Consulting (2011), *Workplace Learning and Assessment in HN Qualifications, Stage 1 Report*, SQA

<sup>43</sup> Bell, I. et al. (2010), *Models of Recognition for Work-Related Learning in Higher Education*. Aiming University Learning @ Work.

<sup>44</sup> Government response to Level 3 Vocational Qualification reform (2013): page 10

<sup>45</sup> The concept of Teach Too is being taken forward by the Education and Training Foundation

Quality of delivery and assessment is also driven by the teaching staff of centres and providers and this research found an almost unanimous request from employers that teaching staff continually cultivate an up to date knowledge of their specialism, and industry subject areas. Recent research conducted by Pye Tait found that teachers' view direct contact with industry as the best way of doing this<sup>46</sup>.

### **Burden on employers**

The type of activities that employers are asked to provide are of critical importance, and consideration needs to be given to the extent to which employers have the capacity to take on, what in some circumstances may be more appropriately described as 'teaching'.

Development of the critical skills and knowledge required for effective qualifications delivery – or teaching – takes time and commitment. Equally, developing a sound knowledge of assessment techniques and strategies can be just as demanding.

Furthermore the majority of employers in this research mentioned the extreme difficulties they face in keeping up with the plethora of constantly changing qualifications, standards, titles, organisations, funding regimes, and so on.

"For around forty years we had ONC/D and HNC/D and they worked quite well. Then, from about 1990 onwards we've had NVQs and standards by the bucket-load, constant changes, more awarding bodies than you can shake a stick it, and now they want us to do the delivering and assessing as well. Why do we have colleges then?"

SME Employer

"A further barrier to engagement for employers is the complexity and lack of stability of the vocational qualifications system."

Review of Adult Vocational Qualifications - UKCES; 2013

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<sup>46</sup> In the summer of 2013 Pye Tait Consulting conducted research on behalf of CITB into the provision of careers information advice and guidance. The research surveyed 750 professional careers 'influencers' in schools, colleges, HEIs and national careers organisations in Great Britain and found that the vast majority see direct and frequent contact with industry as the most effective way of keeping up to date with the latest techniques, skills and industry knowledge.

While employers' staff - especially in smaller companies - may not possess formal teaching qualifications, they are usually very used to teaching in that they need to 'teach' their subordinates and mentor and coach them on an almost continual basis.

Assessment can be regarded – rightly or wrongly – as altogether more involved and requiring formal training or some kind of formal preparation, which takes valuable time and commitment from the employer.

Training providers and employers need to consider carefully and clearly understand the level of commitment that each type of involvement may require of them.

## Appendix 1 – Sample of Qualifications

	Awarding Organisation	Qualification Number (QAN)	Qualification Title	Level	Employer Involvement: Mandatory / Recommended	Sector Subject Area (SSC)
1.	CACHE	501/1258/2	CACHE Level 3 Diploma in Health and Social Care (Adults) for England (QCF)	3	Recommended	1.3 Health and Social Care
2.	Pearson	600/5538/8	Pearson BTEC Level 3 National Certificate in Children's Play, Learning and Development	3	Mandatory	1.5 Child Development and Well-Being
3.	City & Guilds	500/8564/5	City & Guilds Level 3 Diploma in Forestry and Arboriculture (QCF)	3	Mandatory	3.2 Horticulture and Forestry
4.	Highfield	601/2331/X	HABC Level 2 Diploma In Work-based Horticulture (QCF)	2	Mandatory	3.2 Horticulture and Forestry
5.	City & Guilds	600/6052/9	City & Guilds Level 3 Diploma In Veterinary Nursing (QCF)	3	Mandatory	3.3 Animal Care and Veterinary Science
6.	City & Guilds	500/8561/X	City & Guilds Level 3 Diploma in Countryside Management (QCF)	3	Mandatory	3.4 Environmental Conservation

7.	ABC Awards	600/6463/8	ABC Level 4 Diploma in Technical Textiles and Apparel (QCF)	4	Mandatory	4.2 Manufacturing Technologies
8.	Harper Adams University	n/a	Level 4 Foundation Degree in Dairy Technology	4	Mandatory	4.2 Manufacturing Technologies
9.	City & Guilds	501/0865/7	City & Guilds Level 2 Diploma in Aviation Operations on the Ground (QCF)	2	Mandatory	4.3 Transportation Operations and Maintenance
10.	City & Guilds	600/6481/X	City & Guilds Level 3 Principal Learning in Construction and the Built Environment	3	Recommended	5.2 Building and Construction
11.	NOCN	601/0953/1	NOCN Level 2 NVQ Diploma in Steelfixing Occupations (Construction) (QCF)	2	Mandatory	5.2 Building and Construction
12.	Pearson	600/1418/0	Pre-apprenticeship Level 2 Programme of Study (including BTEC) in IT	2	Recommended	6.1 ICT Practitioners
13.	TLM	601/1421/6	TLM Level 3 Certificate in Open Systems Computing (QCF)	3	Mandatory	6.1 ICT Practitioners
14.	VTCT	500/8976/6	VTCT Level 2 Diploma in Women's Hairdressing (QCF)	2	Recommended	7.3 Service Enterprises

15.	VTCT	600/8660/9	Level 2 Diploma in Beauty Therapy Studies (QCF)	2	Recommended	7.3 Service Enterprises
16.	City and Guilds	601/0717/0	City & Guilds Level 2 Diploma In Professional Cookery (QCF)	2	Recommended	7.4 Hospitality and catering
17.	1st4sport	600/1201/8	1st4sport Level 2 NVQ Certificate in Activity Leadership (QCF)	2	Mandatory	8.1 Sport, Leisure and Recreation
18.	CYQ	600/6752/4	CYQ Level 4 Certificate in Weight Management for Individuals with Obesity, Diabetes Mellitus and/or Metabolic Syndrome	4	Mandatory	8.1 Sport, Leisure and Recreation
19.	Pearson	500/7716/8	Pearson BTEC Level 3 Extended Diploma in Music Technology (QCF)	3	Recommended	9.1 Performing Arts
20.	NCTJ	501/1103/6	NCTJ Level 3 Diploma in Journalism (QCF)	3	Mandatory	9.4 Publishing and Information Services



## **Appendix 2 – Employer Involvement Case Studies**

The names of those employers, training providers and other stakeholders interviewed for these case studies have been anonymised to protect their identity.

Pye Tait Consulting would like to thank all participants for their valuable contributions.

<b>Awarding organisation:</b>	<b>City &amp; Guilds</b>
<b>Qualification name:</b>	<b>City &amp; Guilds Level 3 Diploma in Forestry and Arboriculture (QCF)</b>
<b>Number:</b>	<b>500/8564/5</b>
<b>Employer involvement:</b>	<b>Mandatory</b>

## The qualification

The Diploma is one of a suite of qualifications which “meet the needs of learners in a centre-based environment who may wish to work within the forestry or arboriculture industry or progress to further learning and/or training. These qualifications allow learners to develop underpinning knowledge whilst practising skills that could be used within employment in the forestry or arboriculture industry”<sup>47</sup>.

Employer involvement in the qualification is mandatory, and awarded 10 credits through achievement of the mandatory unit “Undertake and Review Work Related Experience in the Land-based Industries”. A second unit stipulates the completion of a project; other units cover topics such as soil science; plant science; planting and aftercare as well as a range of optional units.

The work placement must be of a minimum of 150 hours, or four weeks on each year of the two year course.

## The nature of employer involvement

Employers are involved closely with the college in selecting units for delivery, as are universities. The college tries to engage flexibly with the employer involvement agenda by being industry-led, and this is one such example. Employers are involved in influencing the delivery and also the actual course content, and are further involved in assessment.

For this course, employers are very involved with the college and in such activities as maintaining trees and hedgerows along train tracks and under power lines. The college

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47 Level 3 Certificate, Subsidiary Diploma, 90-Credit Diploma, Diploma, Extended Diploma in Forestry and Arboriculture (0077-03) Version 2.0, City and Guilds, August 2012

is also involved with the Forestry Commission.

The sector – like many others – is dominated by SMEs. They are invited to stakeholder events and they also review modules for the college, along with larger companies. In addition, the college employs guest speakers and lecturers from industry. Many lecturers at the college work part-time as they are themselves, business owners. This is understood to be a common feature of qualifications delivery and assessment in the land-based sector, where historically more employers have a dual role than possibly in any other sector.

Forestry and arboriculture is very specialist, and will require certification in chainsaw use to work in the industry. Business owners are often also qualified in assessing chainsaw use, which provides an additional income. This arrangement works very well because it means that the college is offering industry relevant teaching.

It is unlikely that the learners will find work experience themselves; therefore the college helps learners to source placements. Typically, placements are undertaken with a range of different types of companies, including:

- The Forestry Commission
- Nurseries
- SMEs
- Contractors working for utility companies

The employer is involved in formal assessment of the work placement unit. This is a graded unit, determined both by the learner's punctuality and work assessment. In addition to the contribution to the formal assessment of this unit, the employer is further engaged through providing informal feedback to the college on the learner's progress. Although an informal measure, this form of involvement is highly valued by the college.

The process is managed by the college through visits to the employer's premises to ensure the learner is learning in a safe environment, and then again on completion of the placement to obtain feedback.

Two key challenges are encountered by the college in maintaining employer involvement:

1. ensuring sufficient staff capacity to cover employer visits and to complete the necessary paperwork to fulfil Health and Safety requirements
2. the lack of a formal interface or forum for the college and industry to come together.

## Benefits of employer involvement

### **1. Benefits to the learner**

For the learner, they have the opportunity to experience work, network with other learners and potential employers. The extra skills gained in the workplace, gives them a taste of the real working environment.

### **2. Benefits to the employer**

Employers have the ability to 'mould' the learners to industry requirements, and benefit from the experience by adding to their talent pool as they need.

### **3. Benefits to the provider**

The college maintain its links with industry through employer involvement in qualifications delivery and assessment and builds a reputation amongst industry employers.

<b>Awarding organisation:</b>	<b>City &amp; Guilds</b>
<b>Qualification name:</b>	<b>City &amp; Guilds Level 3 Diploma in Countryside Management (QCF)</b>
<b>Number:</b>	<b>500/8561/X</b>
<b>Employer involvement:</b>	<b>Mandatory</b>

## The qualification

A work placement is a mandatory component of the course, which must be of a minimum of 150 hours, or four weeks on each year of the two year course.

Learners on the course at the college are predominantly aged 16-18, with some mature learners seeking employment in the land-based sector as a career change. These mature learners will typically already have a degree, but choose to study the Diploma because of its strong practical element. To those without a degree, the Diploma can be more appealing as it offers a more practical focus and does not entail the same level of cost to the learner.

Learners gain a strong background in ecology and population, combined with particular components required by employers such as plant, animal and fungi identification. The college has been offering the Diploma for 10 years.

## The nature of employer involvement

City and Guilds include many units to choose from in their specification. Employers are involved closely with the college in selecting units for delivery, as are universities. The college tries to engage flexibly with the employer involvement agenda by being industry-led, and this is one such example. Employers are involved in influencing the delivery and also the actual course content, and are further involved in assessment.

SMEs are invited to stakeholder events and they also review modules for the college, along with larger companies. In addition, the college employs guest speakers and lecturers from industry. Many lecturers at the college work part-time as they are themselves, business owners.

It is unlikely that the learner will find work experience themselves, therefore the college helps learners to source placements. Typically, placements are undertaken with a range of different types of companies, including:

- Parks

- Local Authority County Ecologist Department

The employer is involved in formal assessment of the work placement unit. This is a graded unit, determined both by the learner's punctuality and work assessment. In addition to the contribution to the formal assessment of this unit, the employer is further engaged through providing informal feedback to the college on the learner's progress. Although an informal measure, this form of involvement is highly valued by the college.

The process is managed by the college through visits to the employer's premises to ensure the learner is learning in a safe environment, and then again on completion of the placement to obtain feedback.

Two key challenges are encountered by the college in maintaining employer involvement:

1. ensuring sufficient staff capacity to cover employer visits and to complete the necessary paperwork to fulfil Health and Safety requirements
2. the lack of a formal interface or forum for the college and industry to come together, which needs to be addressed

In the absence of such an education/industry forum, professional bodies and large organisations are seen as the most helpful source of advice because of their specialist knowledge, such organisations include the Wildlife Trust and the National Trust.

### **Benefits of employer involvement**

#### **1. Benefits to the learner**

For the learner, they have the opportunity to experience work, network with other learners and potential employers. The extra skills gained in the workplace, gives them a taste of the real working environment.

#### **2. Benefits to the employer**

Employers have the ability to 'mould' the learners to industry requirements, and benefit from the experience by adding to their talent pool as they need.

#### **3. Benefits to the provider**

The college maintain its links with industry through employer involvement in qualifications delivery and assessment and builds a reputation amongst industry employers.

<b>Awarding organisation:</b>	<b>ABC Awards</b>
<b>Qualification name:</b>	<b>ABC Level 4 Diploma In Technical Textiles and Apparel (QCF)</b>
<b>Number:</b>	<b>601/1784/9</b>
<b>Employer involvement:</b>	<b>Mandatory</b>

## The qualification

In response to a major step change in the manufacturing sector, particularly in terms of demand for high end products manufactured for aerospace<sup>48</sup>, automotive and healthcare, a new set of advanced skills at level 4 needed to be developed. The Sector Skills Council, along with an employer and a training and research facility, supported by other intermediary associates, engaged and consulted a range of employers in 2012 to identify the skills needs in the sector. The Diploma aims to develop learners' understanding and skills in new technologies such as anti-microbial applications and fire resistant treatments in the textiles sector<sup>49</sup>. It will equip individuals with manufacturing and engineering know-how; in particular, new product development, an essential part of developing a balanced portfolio needed to maintain competitive advantage for UK companies. The Diploma is designed either for those who are new to the industry (aged 18/19+) or those who are already working in the industry; it is also part of the Creative Skillset Level 4 Higher Apprenticeship in Fashion and Textiles.

The qualification requires learners to achieve a minimum of 90 credits from one of two pathways:

1. Technical Textiles (TT)
2. Product Development and Sourcing (PDS)

Assessment is via internal assessment, internal and external moderation.

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48 For instance, Boeing has approached UK companies to weave components for their Dreamliner aircraft.

49 ABC Awards website 'Level 4 Diploma in Technical Textiles and Apparel (Technical Textiles)' page:  
<http://www.abcawards.co.uk/fashion-and-textiles/sewing-and-textiles/level-4-diploma-in-technical-textiles-and-apparel-technical-textiles-/1661/>

The currency and relevance of learning at this level is emphasised by the requirement that the delivery of the units has to be complemented with “shop floor” experience, i.e. in the workplace; and the assessment must also take place in the workplace for those units linked to competence.

There are some 38 units available for the learner, a flavour includes:

- Fibres and technical textiles (mandatory – TT)
- Portfolio management of new products (optional – PDS)
- Biodegradable textiles (optional – TT)
- Planning and managing the outsourcing process in manufacturing (optional – PDS)
- Anti-microbial applications for textile products (optional –TT)
- Outsourcing costs in manufacturing (optional – PDS)

### **The nature of employer involvement**

The Diploma – which has recently become available for delivery – consists of two pathways each of which involved extensive employer consultations; the technical textiles pathway was led by the training facility and the sourcing pathway by the employer designed in response to general employer take up of the pilot programme, Advanced Skills for Advanced Manufacturing (ASAM).

The employer trained 12 industrialists who then delivered the training to learners, enabling them to benefit from very current and relevant experience. Eight of these industrialists have been retained by the employer to-date. Employer involvement is also crucial in the assessment of the Diploma, with employers providing expert witnesses<sup>50</sup> who work in partnership with college assessors.

To date, three centres have started delivering the qualification but there are challenges to providers and colleges to commit to involvement in delivery and assessment. The Level 4 Diploma is more strategic in nature than extant level 2 and level 3 qualifications, requiring input from senior people in industry to truly make the qualification fit for purpose. Accessing the required level of industry knowledge can therefore prove challenging for centres.

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<sup>50</sup> Expert witnesses, for example, check a product is fit for purpose – check that it is exactly as it should be if the learner was working at that level in business.



## Benefits of employer involvement

### 1. Benefits to the learner

Learners develop new product management skills, which are more aspirational and provide the learner with a sustainable career path for the future. The involvement of employers – in particular, senior industrialists – helps learners to think strategically. The learner will be equipped to enter a market that will demand those higher skills. Greater detail and explanation for each pathway is available in the Framework documentation<sup>51</sup>.

### 2. Benefits to the employer

For the employer, advanced textile technology know-how is passed on. The training addresses a gap in skills needs, helping employers to survive, make the transition into new markets and improve their commercial success. This is essential for an industry which is witnessing a revival in the UK, in the wake of increasing prices of foreign imports. There is a growing demand for employees skilled in managing the manufacturing and balanced sourcing process.

### 3. Benefits to the provider

The provider is offering the training that employers are demanding. The training was trialled with 22 companies and 150 learners. An independent third party evaluation of the training then deemed it to be a “world class training programme”. The involvement of employers is crucial for centres, to maintain its currency and relevance, particularly as there is a view that current BA and MA programmes are not meeting the needs of industry. The industry needs candidates that are work-ready and the involvement of employers will help colleges working in partnership with industry leaders to deliver to this agenda.

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51 Visit <http://www.afo.sscalliance.org/frameworks-library/index.cfm> and search Fashion and Textiles.

<b>Awarding organisation:</b>	<b>City &amp; Guilds</b>
<b>Qualification name:</b>	<b>City &amp; Guilds Level 3 Principal Learning in Construction and the Built Environment</b>
<b>Number:</b>	<b>600/6481/X</b>
<b>Employer involvement:</b>	<b>Recommended</b>

## The qualification

The City & Guilds' "Construction and the Built Environment Principal Learning" level 3 course<sup>52</sup> is designed to give learners practical experience relevant to the construction and built industries, and to prepare learners for further and higher education. The course will develop understanding of the construction and built industries, and will teach learners about the extent and significance of the built environment.

Industry interaction is encouraged throughout the course specification and guidance for teachers encourages the incorporation into the programme of learning the use of a realistic working environment.

"The most realistic work environment would be a design or planning office and any form of work placement, work experience or work shadowing in such an environment would prove invaluable. If this is not available then presentations by design or planning professionals would be very useful."

Each module is provided with an "Opportunities for applied learning" subsection, which suggests useful group exercises involving interaction with the industry. A number of opportunities for applied learning (50% of the course) are identified with learners – working in small groups – allocated one well-established development, one development in the process of construction and one development at the 'drawing-board' stage.

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52 Main page for the City and Guilds level 3 "Construction and the Built Environment Principal Learning".  
<http://www.cityandguilds.com/Courses-and-Qualifications/construction/construction/2764-principal-learning-for-construction-and-built-environment/level-3>.

Suggested activities for industry interaction include:

- visits to construction sites, local authority planning offices, architects' offices and design studios (for modules 1, 3 and 5);
- talks from experienced services providers (Module 3);
- trips to see first-hand the installation of primary services (Module 3);
- on-site health and safety or tool-box<sup>53</sup> talks (Module 4); and,
- shadowing health and safety officers (Module 4).

### **The nature of employer involvement**

School guidance in respect of industry careers and qualifications is limited and there is in particular a dearth of information about Higher National Certificates and Diplomas.

Clients of the participant employer tend to associate construction with bricklaying, and often do not realise the extent of managerial jobs in the sector. There is reluctance on the part of schools to permit visits from industry professionals to raise awareness, even though this is a service that the employer has offered.

The training provider was involved in piloting this Diploma, which involved considerable work on much of the content. As part of this the learners were required to complete a minimum of 10 days' work experience/placement. Many of the learners found their own work experience, which included approaching employers directly which, in the case of the employer, was facilitated by a national organisation.

The employer takes on 10 low-achieving learners a year who work one day a week with them – depending on the learner. They operate the same system for work experience in college holidays and also offer part time work in the summer period. This provides learners with vocational experience that will help them at college.

The training provider has a dedicated work placement officer, and for the Principal Learning qualification a few placements were obtained in this way. But one of the real issues in the construction industry is overcoming the perception often held by some employers that such youngsters are cheap labour.

The pilot was also run by another training provider which delivered both the Level 2 and

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<sup>53</sup> A short presentation to the workforce on a single aspect of health and safety, HSE, January 2014

Level 3 Diploma; at the higher level, the Diploma – of which the Level 3 Principal Learning was a part – was undertaken by learners as a means to progress to professional careers in the construction industry, such as Quantity Surveyors or Architects.

Industry involvement was invaluable in developing the content of the Diploma, since those working in the industry had the ability and opportunity to bring the content alive i.e. to interpret the Principal Learning specification in a practical way, whereas college and school staff had tended to view the content as largely theoretical.

In addition to providing work experience placements, employers were involved in:

- developing learners' projects – these being linked closely to the workplace
- writing assignments
- mentoring learners

Day to day, learners studied full-time: 3 days a week in school; 1 day a week in the workplace with an employer; 1 day a week on project work.

## **Benefits of employer involvement**

### **1. Benefits to the learner**

The learner experiences the real working environment, learns first-hand valuable lessons, such as when things go wrong and how to deal with problems. This kind of experience isn't always possible to gain in a college environment. In the pilot, employer involvement in the learner interview process gave learners a valuable opportunity to develop interview skills, practising on real employers. This 'real-life' experience is viewed as the most important part of employer involvement, developing in learners a valuable 'work ethic'.

### **2. Benefits to the employer**

Employers can monitor the progress of learners. The industry is crying out for individuals with a decent, well-rounded knowledge. As well as the obvious benefits of having an extra pair of hands in the workplace, employers benefit from a young perspective, or a fresh way of thinking, which can challenge traditional approaches and prompt employers to reflect on their own practice.

### **3. Benefits to the provider**

The opportunity to learn more about the industry, develop professional knowledge of modern methods of construction.

<b>Awarding organisation:</b>	<b>Pearson</b>
<b>Qualification name:</b>	<b>Pre-apprenticeship Level 2 programme of study in IT – including the Pearson BTEC Level 2 Diploma In Information Technology (Specialist) (QCF)</b>
<b>Number:</b>	<b>600/1418/0</b>
<b>Employer involvement:</b>	<b>Recommended</b>

## The qualification

The programme is a pre-apprenticeship level 2 in IT which prepares learners for level 3 apprenticeships<sup>54</sup>. It consists of the Pearson BTEC Level 2 Diploma In Information Technology (Specialist); English and mathematics, employability skills, personal and professional development and work experience.

The aim of the programme was to build a pipeline of future apprentices to help overcome the skills gap within the North East region, and was developed with the aid of the college's existing working relationships with employers. E-skills UK, with funds from the UKCES' Employer Investment Fund, selected a college to run a pilot pre-apprenticeship programme at level 2.

The pre-apprenticeship programme was designed to give young people a taste of what a technology career is like and attract more of them into the sector. It enables school leavers to develop the skills, qualifications and experience they need to secure an apprenticeship or full-time job.

## The nature of employer involvement

Employers were initially involved in curriculum development inception meetings, and contributed to the planning of the programme to ensure that it met their needs. They are further involved throughout the programme on live projects by providing guest speakers, site-visits, employee-mentors, and enhancing the college's staff industry knowledge.

Although employers are not involved in the marking of assessments, they do moderate

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54 For more information see: <http://www.e-skills.com/education/he-and-fe/pre-apprenticeships-and-traineeships/>

projects, and offer peer review and assessment of the skills requirements built into the qualification, skills such as technical and employability. Wherever possible they provide subject matter experts to set out ideas for projects, as well as moderate the completed projects.

Employers are involved in a range of activities associated with the pre-apprenticeship programme:

- Contributing to the curriculum design
- Providing work experience and work placements
- Providing coaching and mentoring
- Setting projects
- Acting as expert witnesses and providing testimony to learners' ability
- Acting as assessors or participating in assessment teams
- Providing facilities and resources to support employability skills development, including interview training and CV support

For input into the programmes the employers did not require any training, but staff who directly interact with the learners, work very closely with college staff which prompts a mutual mentoring system.

The different types of contribution made by employers are managed by the Academy Team at the college interviewed for this case study; the Director liaises directly with organisations' senior management and the curriculum manager and team leaders work closely with organisations' operations staff.

## **Benefits of employer involvement**

### **1. Benefits to the learner**

Learners benefit from direct access to the employers by building their network of contacts but also by being inspired by these role models within the sector. By learners understanding the breadth of opportunities within the industry, it helps to reassure them that numerous roles are available and thus building their confidence in potential employment. This will strengthen their self-esteem. Learners will also benefit from developing the transferable skills required for recruitment into, and progression within, the sector.

### **2. Benefits to the employer**

The employer will be directly involved in creating "a future employment pipeline" into their organisation; one that is developed, designed, and flexible to meet their needs. This gives them a means to address the skills gap within their organisation locally, and

also enables them to make a direct contribution to their bottom line.

### **3. Benefits to the provider**

For the college, they are involved in the delivery of training that is enabling young people to secure jobs, helping the region, and benefitting the wider community. Being involved in this programme helps to differentiate the college from its competitors through the enhanced employer engagement and involvement of local big and small employers. The use of e-skills UK helps to highlight the benefit to employers of working with a local college rather than relying entirely on universities for graduates.

<b>Awarding organisation:</b>	<b>The Learning Machine (TLM)</b>
<b>Qualification name:</b>	<b>TLM Level 3 Certificate in Open Systems Computing (QCF)</b>
<b>Number:</b>	<b>601/1421/6</b>
<b>Employer involvement:</b>	<b>Mandatory</b>

## The qualification

The aim of the Certificate is to “support accelerated progression and improve continuity with supporting technologies” that are less expensive than pre-existing systems such as VLEs (Virtual Learning Environments), and replace them with “free and open source based tools”.

The new qualification has been developed in a collaborative partnership of the AO, a trade association for open source software companies and a professional association concerned with the promotion of learning with technology. The trade association has an ambition for the qualification to connect the industry with schools by facilitating direct input into the curriculum and staff development.

Employer involvement is a mandatory requirement in the assessment process for the qualification. Assessment is to take place in real rather than contrived contexts<sup>55</sup>. This can be achieved via a series of opportunities<sup>56</sup>:

- Partaking in work experience with a company where the learner can make a meaningful programming contribution that contributes to at least one of the Certificate’s two units
- Presenting proposals to critical experts
- Testing code involving third parties
- Providing regular updates on their progress to a work-place mentor

Learners will also be encouraged to seek paid internships, such as the over-18 ‘Google Summer of Code’ stipends. These placements will be recognised as an extension of a project after the qualification has been completed, and can form part of an apprenticeship.

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<sup>55</sup> The Specification for TLM Level 3 Diploma in Open Systems Computing (QCF), p6.

<sup>56</sup> These are **recommended** example methods of the type of cooperation expected.



## **The nature of employer involvement**

The qualification, accredited by The Learning Machine (TLM) and developed by the trade association, involves mandatory employer involvement. The trade association's members are targeted as potential placement providers, as they share business principles and collaborate on projects. The trade association, with guidance by TLM, is also considering the possibility of members becoming assessors or moderators.

The Certificate is a new qualification that will see employers involved in a number of ways, including:

- Offering work experience and placements
- Setting projects
- Coaching and mentoring
- Assessing and moderating

Employer involvement will depend upon the level of interest in the qualification and in the amount of time that members can offer in support of the learners. The trade association is willing to provide support to these SME employers in the provision of "hands on" training. Employers will be expected to contribute to the content of exam papers, support teachers and assessors, and also to help learners by providing real world contexts in which to complete coursework.

## **Benefits of employer involvement**

### **1. Benefits to the learner**

The learner will benefit from interacting with the industry, both in obtaining relevant knowledge, and through the input from real world situations in a corporate environment to support coursework and learning.

Currently, expertise is obtained through extensive personal study as open source technology skills are not taught in compulsory school subjects. Therefore, the qualification would make those interested in pursuing a career in technology aware of the sector.

### **2. Benefits to the employer**

The Certificate meets the trade association's objectives on a number of levels:

- Raising awareness of open source technology
- Widening the skills pool from which to employ; currently there are few recruits with knowledge of open source technologies

- Increasing diversity within the workforce of the industry

### **3. Benefits to the provider**

For the provider, teachers will learn through the assessment process, without having to take time out of teaching or face the cost of going on a training course. Future employer involvement would enable formal delegation of some of the moderation to be passed onto the trade association's members, meaning the qualification could become self-sustaining. If the trade association could pay its members for some of their input, the qualification is more likely to be sustainable.

<b>Awarding organisation:</b>	<b>VTCT</b>
<b>Qualification name:</b>	<b>VTCT Level 2 Diploma in Women's Hairdressing (QCF)</b>
<b>Number:</b>	<b>500/8976/6</b>
<b>Employer involvement:</b>	<b>Recommended</b>

## The qualification

The VTCT “Level 2 Diploma in Women's Hairdressing” is intended to teach women’s hairdressing to people with little or no prior experience and is appropriate for learners aged 16 and over. The Diploma has been designed to develop learners as hairdressers and focuses on practical skills in cutting, dressing, shampooing and colouring and finishing hair. Key knowledge of consulting and advising clients on services, products and techniques alongside the health and safety requirements involved in hairdressing underpin the practical content of the qualification.

In total, seven mandatory units must be completed, together with a minimum of three optional units.

Upon completion, learners can progress to a range of further learning opportunities, such as NVQs or other vocationally-related qualifications at level 3, employment in a salon as a junior stylist or to work as an independent hairdresser. Learners are required to produce a portfolio of evidence to confirm knowledge and understanding and demonstrate competence through observations.

Information provided by VTCT states that employer involvement in classes is actively encouraged for the “VTCT Level 2 Diploma in Women's Hairdressing”. Additionally, VTCT has arranged forums with businesses which will inform the future design and development of this qualification.

## The nature of employer involvement

Whilst not formally recommended in the qualification’s specification employer engagement in delivering sessions and assessment is actively encouraged through centre support mechanisms.

Employer involvement is an essential requirement for those learners who choose to undertake the qualification (typically in a college setting with a college salon) in order to register as a State Registered Hairdresser. In order for this to happen those learners

then must have direct contact with employers throughout their training and assessment. State registration of hairdressers is however completely voluntary and not all learners choose this route. However the involvement of employers serves to improve the learning experience and helps create a valuable link between training providers and employers. More recently VTCT has set up a number of industry and employer forums to involve these stakeholders in the future design, development, delivery and assessment of vocational qualifications.

The employer is involved primarily through the provision of work experience/placements in the salon, offering mentoring and support to learners and creating an environment for them to demonstrate their skills and knowledge. All of the assessment is carried out in college however.

The main role of the employer in this qualification is in 'moulding' the trainee; helping them to build people skills, employability skills and 'real world' experience. This acts as a motivator to learners, but also to the employer, giving them the opportunity to be involved in motivating and educating 'the next generation'.

Generally, all of the employer's staff are involved in some capacity; the trainees support each of the stylists, assisting with technical services and customer service. Involvement presents few challenges, but where difficulties arise this is usually due to the attitude or level of competence of the trainee.

## **Benefits of employer involvement**

### **1. Benefits to the learner**

The learner benefits from being able to engage and commit to a real working environment; working under pressure and dealing with customers who have paid for services. Working in a trading salon provides a true insight to the profession. Learners benefit from observing and working alongside a variety of qualified staff whilst also meeting potential employers and making the most of networking opportunities. They also benefit from obtaining references for job applications – from a 'real employer', rather than the training organisation.

### **2. Benefits to the employer**

Employers benefit on a number of levels. Employer involvement helps to ensure learners have the required level of skill for the profession. Employers may meet potential employees. Employers have the opportunity to help shape centre provision and in turn the new generation of hairdressers.

Employers also stay abreast of current education policy that is likely to impact on current and future employees. Employers also benefit through developing the coaching and

mentoring skills of their staff.

### **3. Benefits to the provider**

Providers benefit from a raised profile as their learners are in contact with the community; learners' skills are also showcased potentially improving their chances of employment. After experiencing the real working environment learners are able to give valuable feedback to the centre on what they have learned and evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses which can feed into their individual learning plans. This can then be integrated into further teaching and assessments.

The fact that the learner is acquiring employability skills in a real working environment is invaluable; these really cannot be taught in any other way. There are the wider benefits associated with employer, trainer and trainee collaboration.

<b>Awarding organisation:</b>	<b>VTCT</b>
<b>Qualification name:</b>	<b>VTCT Level 2 Diploma in Beauty Therapy Studies (QCF)</b>
<b>Number:</b>	<b>600/8660/9</b>
<b>Employer involvement:</b>	<b>Recommended</b>

## The qualification

The Level 2 Diploma in Beauty Therapy Studies is a qualification that has been specifically designed to “develop learners’ practical skills by covering the following mandatory units; facial skincare, waxing, eyelash and eyebrow treatments, manicure, pedicure, client care and health and safety.”<sup>57</sup> Learners will also gain underpinning knowledge of anatomy and physiology, health and safety and customer care to support the skills gained during their course.

Learners develop their knowledge and understanding of the practical skills in beauty therapy to a high level of occupational ability, to enable them to perform beauty therapy treatments in a salon.

## The nature of employer involvement

Whilst not formally recommended in the qualification’s specification; employer engagement is actively encouraged through centre support mechanisms, and this involves employer input in the delivery of training as well as the assessment of learners.

Having direct contact with employers throughout their training and assessment is essential for learners (typically within a college setting with a college salon) as it enables them to become eligible for professional beauty treatment insurance and work as an employed and/or self-employed beauty therapist. This direct employer engagement greatly enhances the learning experience. Learners are inspired by those who are successful in an area in which they wish to follow and by learning from people currently active in industry. The involvement of employers helps to create a valuable link between training providers and employers, in terms of post-course job placements for

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<sup>57</sup> From the specification of the VTCT Level 2 Diploma in Beauty Therapy Studies (QCF), in the Qualifications section of the VTCT website. Available at <http://www.vtct.org.uk/>

learners.

More recently VTCT has set up a number of industry and employer forums to involve these stakeholders in the future design, development, delivery and assessment of vocational qualifications. Assessment takes place via work placements/work experience, expert witness/testimony and coaching/mentoring.

One of the participant training providers delivers the VTCT Level 2 Diploma in Beauty Therapy Studies course full-time to 14-19 year olds, and from which they benefit from 1 day a week work experience. A commercial salon is also operated as part of the course. Assessment is via observation and portfolio of evidence and the course runs for a year. Employers are involved in coaching/mentoring, work experience and witness testimony validation of assessments in the salon. The provider develops relationships with local salons through a nominated business development person.

Relationships with salons are not formalised but they have been ongoing for a number of years. All salons have to commit to checks run by a local education business partnership to make sure they provide a safe environment for the provider's learners. The relationship with local salons has been in place since the provider opened its own commercial salon in 2010. It works with many employers – and the setup with the VTCT Level 2 Diploma in Beauty Therapy Studies is a typical arrangement.

The relationship is managed through telephone, e-mail communications and visits, and the employer conducts assessment observations, mentoring and overseeing/supervising practical work.

The majority of the provision offered by another training provider interviewed leads to Vocationally Related Qualifications (VRQs) and the arrangement to offer the VTCT Level 2 Diploma in Beauty Therapy Studies arose through staff and learners seeking either voluntary work experience placement or part time employment.

This provider's learners either work part time within the industry or attend voluntarily in their own time. The full time provision changed radically 2 years ago when the provider was encouraged to move away from NVQ to VRQ type qualifications. In essence this meant that work placement was no longer mandatory – it is however desirable and actively encouraged.

Although in VRQs the provision of work placements is desirable and actively encouraged, the removal of a mandatory requirement for such employer involvement removed the element of responsibility from individual providers for the completion of Health and Safety checks and documentation.

“It is essential that learners who undertake a qualification (typically in a college setting with a college salon) that qualifies them to gain insurance to work as an employed and/or self-employed beauty therapist must have direct contact with employers throughout their training and assessment. This is seen as greatly enhancing the learning experience by learning from people currently active in industry, learners are inspired by those who are successful in an area in which they wish to follow.”

Awarding Organisation

### **Difficulty engaging with small and medium sized employers**

The second provider reports that it is very difficult to engage with employers. Even where training organisations attend employer events, showcases, trade shows etc., attendance can be poor. Most employers in the beauty therapy sector are SMEs, and unable to justify the expense incurred by engaging in partnerships other than through a work-based or apprenticeship route.

This provider believes employers must be realistic and understand that thorough underpinning knowledge and practice will equip future staff with the skills required for the industry. They also noted the difficulties they experience with employers not trained in coaching, mentoring or assessment techniques.

The first provider notes that it is difficult for learners to gain experience that is really valuable – lots of employers are happy for learners to answer the phones, make drinks, make up treatment couches etc. but not many let them practise with their clients - because some procedures are painful and very intimate and the client is not sure of the skill level of the learner. Most learners start on reception duties and work their way up to painting nails, providing head massages, pedicures, then they progress to waxing, then ear piercing.

This provider praised VTCT for employing staff who have worked in the industry. Employer involvement however in the VTCT Level 2 Diploma in Beauty Therapy Studies is not mandatory.

Ensuring employer involvement is harder in beauty than for example in hairdressing because of the almost clinical nature of some of the procedures. Beauty salons can be quite small so there is a practical reason of there not always being much room for another person; the treatment space is naturally intended to be private.



## Benefits of employer involvement

### **1. Benefits to the learner**

The learner benefits from engaging and committing with the workplace; they acquire real life experience; these learners have a much better experience than perhaps participating as guinea pigs in college salons with low expectations.

### **2. Benefits to the employer**

The employer benefits from the opportunities to engage in coaching, mentoring and assessment. They are able to train a new generation and might have a role in ensuring provision in the industry is what it needs it to be.

### **3. Benefits to the provider**

The provider benefits from delivery and quality monitoring – it is able to deliver training that is valuable to employers and produces motivate and enthusiastic learners. There are the wider benefits associated with employer, trainer and trainee collaboration.

<b>Awarding organisation:</b>	<b>City &amp; Guilds</b>
<b>Qualification name:</b>	<b>City &amp; Guilds Level 2 Diploma in Professional Cookery (QCF)</b>
<b>Number:</b>	<b>601/0717/0</b>
<b>Employer involvement:</b>	<b>Recommended</b>

## The qualification

The qualification is intended to allow learners to learn, develop and practise the skills required for employment and/or career progression in the catering and hospitality sector.

The qualification includes one unit that is intended to “enable the learner to develop the knowledge and understanding to apply the personal skills required within the workplace in the catering and hospitality industry. A high level of interpersonal skills is required of those working in this industry which must be maintained when working under pressure. In this unit learners will explore what is an acceptable personal image and the types of behaviours associated with professionalism in the industry. They will practise communication and team working”.<sup>58</sup>

The qualification specification recommends a number of different delivery strategies for the qualification, amongst these:

“Work placements should be encouraged in local restaurants, cafes, pubs and hotels where access to the public is possible. Equally, guest speakers from local employers and visits to local restaurants, hotels and conferences should be encouraged.

It may benefit candidates if practical activities are delivered in a realistic working environment, but this is not a requirement of the qualification.”

The specification encourages the integration of wider learning opportunities, beyond the

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<sup>58</sup> City and Guilds Level 2 Diploma in Professional Cookery (7100-12), Qualification handbook for centres QAN (601/0717/0), Version 1.1 (September 2013), August 2013

completion of external assessments.

The qualification is assessed through a combination of practical demonstration, assignments, observations and the development of a portfolio. Throughout delivery and assessment the focus on workplace skills within the catering and hospitality industry is of paramount importance.

### **The nature of employer involvement**

The qualification gives learners an understanding of how practical hospitality and catering operations work. It is taught in kitchens in the college. The learners spend 17 hours per week at the college.

Employers are involved in a number of ways, including:

- Second marking of synoptic tests – usually chefs from local restaurants or hotels (recommended as good practice by the AO and generally achieved by the college)
- The college holds a lot of events involving local employers, mainly about networking
- Employer forums and chef forums
- Work experience
- Some lecturers are part-time chefs

There is no written contract in place with the employers involved, other than with those who are employing apprentices. The current arrangements have been in place for ‘a long time,’ and the college finds it gets easier to arrange employer involvement as more and more learners are working in the local area.

Work experience is monitored by the college. Learners work alongside chefs, mainly to develop employability skills and experience the ‘stress’ and ‘pressure’ of a real catering environment, rather than in the ‘practice kitchen’ in the college.

Various local employers are involved with the college, and these include both hotels and restaurants. Where industry practitioners conduct ‘second marking’, this is performed alongside college staff. Independent tutors conduct this assessment where it is not possible to secure the services of a working chef although these instances are relatively uncommon.

Assessment is generally carried out in a skills development class, although in some circumstances it can take place in a realistic working environment, for example if learners are unable to sit the initial assessment or have to re-take it.

The college staff tend to build up working relationships with individuals in local companies, however this can prove challenging on occasions because those working in the industry typically only remain with an employer for a few years before moving on.

The college provides employers with an outline of what they are looking for in terms of work experience and an indication of the level that the learner is working at. College staff generally do not require support to work with employers, as many of them are still in the industry themselves.

## **Benefits of employer involvement**

### **1. Benefits to the learner**

Learners experience the benefit of working in a wider range of workplaces and therefore gain a more realistic view of what the industry is about. They are able to understand the industry and its requirements better and become better equipped to enter it.

### **2. Benefits to the employer**

The main benefit to the employer is the opportunity to see a range of learners and assess them over time before committing to employing them. The learners are able to do some useful work which is of benefit to the employer. Learners are more employable, and they will have been assessed on the skills required to obtain employment as a chef.

### **3. Benefits to the provider**

Employer involvement enhances the reputation of the employer and the profile of the learners; the latter are perceived as being more employable, which draws a positive reflection on the provider. Employer involvement gives greater validity and value to the course in the eyes of employers.

<b>Awarding organisation:</b>	<b>Pearson</b>
<b>Qualification name:</b>	<b>Pearson BTEC Level 3 Extended Diploma in Music Technology (QCF)</b>
<b>Number:</b>	<b>500/7716/8</b>
<b>Employer involvement:</b>	<b>Recommended</b>

## The qualification

The Pearson “BTEC Level 3 Extended Diploma in Music Technology” is designed to provide learners with a body of musical and technical knowledge which is both widely applicable and suited to the needs of the music industry<sup>59</sup>. The extended diploma is equivalent to college education, and is intended to prepare learners for employment or higher education; its purpose is to extend and deepen the specialist work-related focus of precursor qualifications.

The Diploma consists of five mandatory units, covering listening skills for music technologists; music production techniques; planning and delivering a music project; sequencing systems and techniques; the sound and music industry. Learners can choose from 25 optional units covering topics such as acoustics, arrangement, composition, DJ performance, music and sound for the moving image, freelancing, amongst others.

As the qualification specification states *“there is potential for the qualification to prepare learners for appropriate direct employment in the vocational sector and it is suitable for those who have decided that they clearly wish to enter a particular specialist area of work. It is broadly equivalent to three GCE A Levels.”*<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Statement of purpose for the Edexcel “BTEC Level 3 Extended Diploma in Music Technology”.  
<http://www.edexcel.com/migrationdocuments/BTEC%20Nationals%20from%202010/SoP-50077168-Pearson%20BTEC%20Level%203%20Extended%20Diploma%20in%20Music%20Technology.pdf>.

<sup>60</sup> Pearson Music and Music Technology (QCF) Specification for first teaching September 2010, Issue 4

<b>Awarding organisation:</b>	<b>Pearson</b>
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## **The nature of employer involvement**

Employer involvement is recommended as part of qualification delivery and assessment, with emphasis on the practical application of the assessment and grading criteria, as well as using practical activities in course delivery and work experience.

The qualification specification recommends certain modes of delivery and, in reference to part-time learners, suggests a number of means by which providers should aim to enhance the vocational nature of the qualification:

- “liaising with employers to ensure a course relevant to learners’ specific needs
- accessing and using non-confidential data and documents from learners’ workplaces
- including sponsoring employers in the delivery of the programme and, where appropriate, in the assessment
- linking with company-based/workplace training programmes
- making full use of the variety of experience of work and life that learners bring to the programme.”

The physical resources used to support delivery of the programme should normally be of industry standard.

The college participating in the case study adopted an approach to delivery which makes use of a real-life working environment through delivery in a live music venue. The employer, a council run venue, provides a classroom in-situ at local music rooms which is rented by the college. The classroom can be opened out into the venue providing learners with direct access to, and experience of, a working venue and its equipment; the arrangement is formalised through a rental agreement.

Work experience is also offered on an ad-hoc basis by the employer; learners volunteer at local outdoor events such as Music Festivals, Summer Park Festivals and, at individual shows across the city. Staff have been further involved in delivery by giving talks to learners in support of specific units, one such example being ‘Marketing and Promotion in the Music Industry’ where the local music company Managing Director spoke to learners on marketing techniques.

<b>Awarding organisation:</b>	<b>Pearson</b>
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Day to day, learners are involved in various practical activities which can include setting up amplifiers and microphones for performers. The Slade Rooms' staff take an active interest in learner development so that the youngsters are fully employable on completion of the course. This is seen as a critical addition to the technical skills developed, providing learners with additional, transferable skills in demand by employers.

There are a number of critical components that must be worked at for employer involvement to be a success:

- Commitment from both parties
- Trusted and knowledgeable staff
- Willingness for centre staff to work outside of 'office' hours
- Commitment needs to come 'from the top'
- Time for centre staff to keep in constant contact with the employer
- The training must match what the employer needs and uses on a day to day basis (e.g. software)
- Flexibility (from both the centre and employer perspective)

The skills gained on work experience add value to the learners' performance although the placement is not formally assessed. The college reports that the employer's comments, feedback and evaluation frequently contribute to the achievement of excellent grades for learners taking this qualification.

## **Benefits of employer involvement**

### **1. Benefits to the learner**

As a result of employer involvement the learner gains a set of vocationally relevant skills, develops confidence to use them in a work environment, together with an understanding of the reality of work.

### **2. Benefits to the employer**

The employer benefits from a young person's viewpoint, in this case on current market trends – this is invaluable for the creative industry. The employer welcomes the additional, fresh perspective and injection of energy into the business and is reassured that the learners are being equipped with the necessary skills, valued by employers.

### **3. Benefits to the provider**

The involvement of the employer ensures that courses are vocationally relevant to what the college is trying to deliver, whether the intention is that the learner will progress to Higher Education or to employment. Crucially, employer involvement makes courses

<b>Awarding organisation:</b>	<b>Pearson</b>
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more engaging and enjoyable and relevant to work.



<b>Awarding organisation:</b>	<b>National College for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ)</b>
<b>Qualification name:</b>	<b>NCTJ Level 3 Diploma in Journalism (QCF)</b>
<b>Number:</b>	<b>501/1103/6</b>
<b>Employer involvement:</b>	<b>Mandatory</b>

## The qualification

The NCTJ “Level 3 Diploma in Journalism” is designed to equip learners with the skills required for professional journalism employment<sup>61</sup>. The diploma is appropriate for learners of college-age and above who already work in journalism or who want to work in journalism. The qualification is designed to equip learners with the skills needed for multi-platform journalism whether in newspapers, magazines, online, television or radio.

One of the mandatory modules, ‘multimedia portfolio for journalists’, requires learners to produce 10 articles/broadcast packages – preferably published/broadcast. The NCTJ recommends a minimum of 10 days’ work experience at a learner’s chosen media organisation in order to practise their skills in the workplace and gather stories for their portfolio.

Achievement of the qualification can lead to employment within the industry and provide access for entry to the National Qualification in Journalism (NQJ). The NQJ is the industry’s professional qualification and is open to entrants who have worked in the industry for a minimum of 18 months. Entrants must have achieved at least a Grade C in each of the units of the Level 3 Diploma in Journalism, be able to demonstrate 100wpm shorthand and have completed the module on media law court

## The nature of employer involvement

Employer involvement is mandatory in the delivery of the Diploma, and involves:

- assessment of written and practical coursework by qualified journalist trainers and practitioners
- industry practitioners are heavily involved in setting and marking NCTJ

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<sup>61</sup> Qualification specification for the NCTJ “Level 3 Diploma in Journalism”.

<http://www.nctj.com/downloadlibrary/Diploma%20in%20Journalism%20qualification%20specification.pdf>

examinations, which are designed to meet industry standards and ensure learners can apply their skills to 'real-world' scenarios

The Diploma syllabus is set by a Journalism Board consisting of working journalists under guidance from NCTJ. Of the five mandatory units, each centre marks the examinations for three of them and the other two are returned to the NCTJ. NCTJ has a 'bank' of markers who are qualified journalists and examinations for the remaining two mandatory units as well as a selection of the optional units are sent to these markers.

Whilst working towards the Diploma, the NCTJ strongly recommend that learners undertake work experience, with all NCTJ-accredited providers incorporating a period of at least two weeks work experience in a newsroom on their courses.

"The Diploma in Journalism will incorporate programmes of study that will be taught for a minimum of 650 guided learning hours. Written and practical coursework will be set and marked by approved centres and assessed to industry standards by qualified journalist trainers and practitioners. The coursework will incorporate practical tasks based in the classroom and/or in the real world covering the areas outlined in this syllabus."

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Work experience can take place at a learner's chosen media organisation in order to practise their skills in the workplace and gather stories for their portfolio. This varies from centre to centre. At one of the colleges interviewed for this case study, learners are expected to find their own work experience – supported with help from tutors. A list of newspapers, magazines, websites and broadcasters on friendly terms with the college is supplied to applicants who attend a pre-test to get on the course. During their induction, editors from local news outlets address the learners and request future stories from them – as well as offering work experience opportunities.

All learners are tracked to make sure they carry out work experience and this is the main way employers are involved in the Diploma. One of the national news-broadcasters occasionally offer a prize of two week work experience for the first sports reporter to gain their 100wpm shorthand exam. Another delivers CV and interview preparation and the editor of a tabloid paper based in London prepares learners on ways of how to best pitch their stories to editors.

People with practical knowledge are immediately useful to employers. And in a fast paced and constantly evolving working environment this is particularly the case. The

NCTJ are totally against ‘bums on seats’. Journalism is a tough and fast paced career and one which is often misunderstood and/or misrepresented. Course providers are keen that learners are stringently vetted at the application stage by both interview and through evidence of any previous work for school or university publications for example. The NCTJ insists that applicants to the diploma are interviewed.

Employers frequently want centres to train their new intake but it can be difficult to get employers involved. From the perspective of the training provider, a small investment by the employer can mean a big payback later on down the line.

## **Benefits of employer engagement**

### **1. Benefits to the learner**

The learner is able to apply his/her skills in a workplace environment and gain an in depth knowledge of how the newsroom operates on a daily and cyclical basis. Learners gain valuable work based training and the opportunity to have their work published. A portfolio of cuttings is considered essential for graduates to have when they leave the course and start applying for jobs.

### **2. Benefits to the employer/provider**

The classroom training element is essential for teaching skills that cannot be taught on the job – in particular shorthand, transcription, media law and public affairs. For the fast-track and year-long candidates employers are able to identify future employees who are doing work experience and they are also being provided with valuable content.

## **Predominantly work-based qualifications**

These are generally undertaken by work based employees but nevertheless provide useful insight into employer involvement with qualifications.

<b>Awarding organisation:</b>	<b>Highfield Awarding Body for Compliance (HABC)</b>
<b>Qualification name:</b>	<b>HABC Level 2 Diploma In Work-based Horticulture (QCF)</b>
<b>Number:</b>	<b>601/2331/X</b>
<b>Employer involvement:</b>	<b>Mandatory</b>

## **The qualification**

The employer is a large facilities management company with around 35,000 employees, working with 2,000 clients. The main activities consist of reception and food services, security and maintenance and grounds maintenance for schools, hospitals, prisons and military bases.

The relationship with the training provider came about due to the company taking on a new member of staff who had previously worked for the provider. At the time, the employer was looking for a training course that went beyond the existing Apprenticeship – badged within the company as the ‘Bronze Award’ – and the training provider was suggested as a suitable starting point to put together the training package.

The provider worked directly with Highfield in the delivery of other qualifications and, in one of their regular meetings with the centre the AO asked if they would be interested in delivering any of their other qualifications, in addition to the Health and Safety qualifications that they offered. The training provider enquired about the possibility of delivering the Diploma in Work-Based Horticulture to its clients, and offering dual-badging on learner certificates. Highfield facilitated the request, and the provider became the training partner to deliver the ‘learning’ elements.

Units covering spraying and chainsaw skills were included, along with a First Aid certificate. The key was to include less emphasis on basic fundamental skills assessment, and more on practical skills to better match the learning profile of learners who may have difficulties such as dyslexia and are therefore attracted to a vocational route, rather than following an academic pathway.

## **The nature of employer involvement**

The employer role is to provide work experience and placements, and to coach and mentor the learners. The qualification is delivered in partnership between the employer and the provider, with all assessment carried out by the latter.

All of the classroom training is delivered in the depot classroom, with an assessor on-site to assess the tasks; this provides a good balance between direct delivery and workplace assessment to minimise the cost of classroom delivery.

Classroom learning and delivery is much easier to conduct in the winter months as opposed to at the peak working periods during the summer.

The main challenges were the logistics of putting together the scheme, as well as navigating government funding streams. However, the main result of working with the training provider and the AO to develop the qualification is that the employer is now assured of a consistent standard of training across the country. It gives employees status as they are recognised by their association with the employer, and in the grounds and maintenance industry they are seen as the best at what they do.

The training provider works closely with employers as a matter of course, to deliver pre-employment training at level 1 for people not employed in the sector, but who are seeking a career. This helps to prepare the learners for employment and for entry onto a level 2 qualification. Employer relationships are fostered by the training provider's dedicated business development team, understanding what employers want and then tailoring the Diploma to suit their needs.

Because of the nature of the sector – the seasonality of competitive tendering – it can sometimes be difficult for learners to be released to attend the classroom elements of the training.

## **Benefits of employer involvement**

### **1. Benefits to the learner**

For the learner, they benefit from the status in the industry of the employer – one that is synonymous with hard work in challenging conditions. Completion of this qualification can also be used as a pathway into a level 2 qualification. Extensive involvement with the employer exposes the learner to the industry and ensures that they practically apply their theoretical knowledge.

### **2. Benefits to the employer**

'Reinvigorated every single day'. Many contracts require that staff are qualified to a certain level. Involvement in the qualification – in terms of ensuring it is tailored to the specific needs of clients – helps to meet this requirement. It helps reduce any negative perceptions about the industry.

### **3. Benefits to the provider**

The provider benefits from a close working relationship with the employer which

enhances the employability of their learners, by ensuring key industry skills are included in the delivery of the qualification.

<b>Awarding organisation:</b>	<b>CACHE</b>
<b>Qualification name:</b>	<b>CACHE Level 3 Diploma in Health and Social Care (Adults) for England (QCF)</b>
<b>Number:</b>	<b>501/1258/2</b>
<b>Employer involvement:</b>	<b>Recommended</b>

## The qualification

The CACHE Level 3 Diploma in Health and Social Care (Adults) for England is designed to develop and assess skills relating to health and social care with adults. The Diploma is appropriate for people working in, or who wish to work in, a senior role in health and social care for adults.

In order to study the Diploma, learners will need to be working, volunteering or on a practical placement<sup>62</sup>. The work-based practice of learners will be assessed as part of the Diploma using the following methods<sup>63</sup>:

- Direct observation of practice
- Witness evidence
- Learner's log of practice in real work situations
- Planned activities

Employer involvement in delivery and assessment is recommended by the AO, in order for learners to develop competences considered only possible to develop in a real working environment, rather than mandatory.

However, while learners 'need' to be working, volunteering or on a practical placement during completion of the qualification - employer involvement in this qualification remains as 'recommended'. Making it mandatory is not formally agreed because of situations that may occur; for example, a learner may be in a part-time job relevant to,

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62 There is no specified minimum amount of work placement however, the learner will need a sufficient amount of time in the workplace to be able to achieve all the assessment criteria. This may depend on the circumstances of the provider and learner.

63 Qualification specification available at [http://www.cache.org.uk/Qualifications/HSC/HSCL3/Documents/L3%20D%20HSC%20\(Adults\)%20Eng%20Qual%20Spec%20v6%200.pdf](http://www.cache.org.uk/Qualifications/HSC/HSCL3/Documents/L3%20D%20HSC%20(Adults)%20Eng%20Qual%20Spec%20v6%200.pdf)



but independent from, the qualification.

### **The nature of employer involvement**

At the training provider interviewed for this case study, learners spend two days a week on work placement where they are required to complete a minimum of 6 hours per day and are expected to build a portfolio of evidence. College assessors visit the workplace to set work criteria required by the AO, including assessment principles set out by Skills for Care and Development (the sector skills council), and to assess achievement. Assessment is competency-based and work in class and the placement is signed off by industry-experienced tutors.

Work placements are sought and secured by the college, through a network of existing employers with whom – in many cases – long-standing relationships are held. The network was established through the delivery of a predecessor qualification and the college staff have worked to maintain these links.

A number of teachers are from industry, or are still actively employed, providing the college with a large number of contacts to draw upon.

Relationships are not formalised in any way between the employer and the centre, these being built on trust and nurtured over time; no formal contract or written agreement exists. In some cases however, learners do go on to attain paid employment with an employer perhaps in night or weekend shifts. The arrangement is described as typical in the care sector.

As well as offering a work placement (although usually the learner is employed directly), the employer will help to select qualification units relevant to their needs. For example, those involved in care of the elderly or in mental health are able to select units specific to these contexts. Employers will also become involved in supervising, training and buddying learners. Although this can be time intensive for the employer, the benefit of gaining an extra pair of hands will usually outweigh the time commitment.

Contact between the college and the employer is managed through regular telephone and e-mail contact, supplemented by four visits per year. From the perspective of the employer, this will usually entail no more than a few hours a month to keep in touch with the college. Other commitments involved initial training from the college in what to expect from learners and what it would be most valuable for learners to learn whilst undertaking their work placement.

Relationships between the college and local employers are reported as being good and, because these relationships have been in place for some time, no specific problems or issues are encountered. There are however two ongoing challenges:

1. Limitations on time mean it is not always possible to secure the involvement of additional employers; and,
2. Learner expectations need to be balanced with what is practical in the workplace and this means ensuring that learners do not feel exploited when undertaking their work placements.

Ensuring learners attend the work placement on time to complete the criteria they are being assessed against can also be a challenge, but this reinforces the importance of communication between college and employer.

## **Benefits of employer involvement**

### **1. Benefits to the learner**

The learner knows that, from the experience they have gained, they stand a good chance of gaining paid employment.

### **2. Benefits to the employer**

The employer is assured that learners are gaining real hands-on experience under the supervision of qualified professionals. The employer may also use the opportunity to recruit staff, with many learners employed straight from college.

### **3. Benefits to the provider**

The network of contacts gained by the college provides a rich and valuable source of staff CPD.

<b>Awarding organisation:</b>	<b>Pearson</b>
<b>Qualification name:</b>	<b>Pearson BTEC Level 3 National Certificate in Children's Play, Learning and Development</b>
<b>Number:</b>	<b>600/5538/8</b>
<b>Employer involvement:</b>	<b>Mandatory</b>

### **The qualification**

The Certificate is designed for post-16 learners, and aims to develop their knowledge and understanding of Early Years teaching. It combines college based learning and the opportunity to apply this in a work related context.

The qualification requires learners to undertake 800 hours of placement experience with the stated age ranges, which is organised by a team of College Placement Co-ordinators. The learners are supported during their placements by a work-place mentor and a College Placement Co-ordinator, who visits regularly to observe the learner in practice and liaises with the work-place mentor.

Learners are required to complete a 'Skills for Practice' Log during their placement which documents their progress in a variety of relevant areas. The training is organised with an initial block of study in the college environment followed by a fortnightly pattern of alternate college and placement time.

### **The nature of employer involvement**

The BTEC qualification, which has been provided by the college for over 25 years (the current qualification was redeveloped for 2012), requires learners to participate in mandatory work placements. During their placement, learners are invited to shadow staff and are assigned a work-place mentor. This staff member conducts an initial induction and a daily discussion with the learner about work opportunities within the daily routine. This mentor also acts as a witness for the learners' Skills for Practice Log, and completes a final report upon the placement completion.

Learners receive support from a variety of different members of staff during their placement:

1. Health and safety inductions and admin requirements
2. Placement management, such as inductions and monitoring

3. Day to day mentoring
4. Competition of witness statements and signing off demonstrations of competency

The college provides employers with the opportunity to visit the college to observe the formal teaching process, and the college's visiting tutors offer ongoing support for the learners and the employer if required.

Employers provide feedback to the college allowing learners' training to be updated to incorporate any changes to the industry standards. This ensures quality of the training provided by the college and continuous improvement.

Written assignments are expected to include case studies and examples from placement settings. For some units, such as Unit 9 Observations, Assessment and Planning for Play and Development, these assignments are expected to include witness testimonies, feedback from others, personal reflection, further observations of the child and comments from the child or parent.

In order to obtain a 'distinction', written assignments are expected to include evidence from case studies or observations and further reading to reach conclusions.

For all assessments, learners must provide evidence from at least three different early years' settings across the age ranges, within the assessment of these units. This can be achieved through visits, visiting speakers, case studies, observations and placements.

## **Benefits of employer involvement**

### **1. Benefits to the learner**

Learners have the opportunity to observe positive working relationships and experience a supportive team ethos, and they are able to practically apply their theoretical knowledge in a supportive environment. The employer's support enables learners to develop their skills and reflect on good working practice and assist them in their preparation for employment. It helps them improve their employability and enhances their CV/UCAS application. The Skills for Practice log is tangible evidence they can show to prospective employers/HEIs.

### **2. Benefits to the employer**

The employer is actively involved in developing the future workforce by passing on their knowledge and understanding. Providing training ensures that the employer regularly reflects on the quality of their own practice, and helps to maintain high standards. Employer involvement with learners' training also exposes practitioners to new information and ideas.

### **3. Benefits to the provider**

For the college, the mutually beneficial relationship between themselves and the employer ensures the successful development of the future workforce. Collaborating with an industry-based placement provider ensures that the college's learners are able to develop reflective practice skills, and a raised profile within the community.

<b>Awarding organisation:</b>	<b>City &amp; Guilds</b>
<b>Qualification name:</b>	<b>City &amp; Guilds Level 3 Diploma in Veterinary Nursing</b>
<b>Number:</b>	<b>600/6052/9</b>
<b>Employer involvement:</b>	<b>Mandatory</b>

## The qualification

The level 3 diploma in veterinary nursing is a qualification that prepares veterinary nurses for professional registration with the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. There are currently three optional pathways; small animal, equine or mixed practice veterinary nursing.<sup>64</sup>

Trainee veterinary nurses are required to achieve a minimum overall period of training of 94 weeks (3290 hours) of which 60 weeks (2100 hours) are practical training within an approved veterinary nursing training practice.

The qualification offers a balance of theoretical and practical training to gain the required knowledge and clinical skills necessary for an effective and rewarding professional career as a veterinary nurse.

## The nature of employer involvement

The employer is involved in the delivery and assessment of this qualification in a number of ways including:

- Expert witness/testimony
- Coaching/mentoring
- Work experience/placements
- As assessors/on assessment teams (e.g. marking/moderating)

Learners work at the practice in a full time capacity and college one day per week.

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64 Information in this section is taken from the City & Guilds Qualification Handbook for the Level 3 Diploma in Veterinary Nursing, October 2012, Version 1.9, updated September 2013. It can be accessed on the City and Guilds website through the relevant 'Course and Qualifications' pathway <http://www.cityandguilds.com/courses-and-qualifications/land-based-services/animal-management/7457-veterinary-nursing/level-3>

When at work, the learners work with clinical coaches to complete the online 'Nursing Progress Log'<sup>65</sup> of practical nursing skills. The skills are taught and assessed to complement the theory and assessments delivered by the college.

Employers play a critical role in the training and assessment of learner veterinary nurses. All training practices are required to demonstrate that they have the necessary facilities, caseload and personnel to support learner veterinary nurse training. Each learner veterinary nurse is allocated a trained and qualified Clinical Coach who acts as a supervisor in a clinical capacity, coaching and assessing the learners' clinical veterinary nursing skills. Clinical Coaches are experienced and either Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) registered veterinary nurses or surgeons. Other members of the practice offer support to the training of learner veterinary nurses as well for example receptionists, laboratory technicians, practice managers etc. During the period of practical training learners are required to demonstrate competence in all of the veterinary nursing skills required of their pathway.

The veterinary practice has trained learners for over 30 years and its principal motivation is to provide its practice with qualified nurses.

The practice offers work experience placements to local schools (week long placements), A level learners and provides Extra-Mural Studies (EMS)<sup>66</sup> for Veterinary Learners attending university. It also uses other centres to provide training to its nurses on a day release basis.

The relationship between the college and its training practices has changed over the years and veterinary nursing training practice employers are now predominately responsible for the practical training and assessment of the qualification. The college acts to quality assure the work of the training practice and it employs experienced and industry qualified veterinary nursing staff to support the relationship with its associated training practices.

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65 The RCVS Veterinary Nursing Progress Log (NPL) is an electronic log which allows learners to record their clinical experiences against skills criteria during their practical time in clinical practice.

66 Learners must complete a minimum of 38 weeks EMS during their course, which should normally consist of 12 weeks pre-clinical and 26 weeks of clinical placements. EMS is made up of the 'pre-clinical' or animal husbandry phase, and the clinical EMS phase, which comprises 'preparatory EMS' (6 weeks in which learners should undertake at least three different types of placements to experience a range of veterinary work) and 'practical EMS' (the remaining 20 weeks, to be undertaken during the later clinical years). Source: <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/education/extra-mural-studies-ems/>

## Benefits of employer involvement

### **1. Benefits to the learner**

The main benefit to the learner is the opportunity to become an RCVS registered veterinary nurse on successful completion of the qualification. The learner also benefits from a supportive learning environment and the balance of theory and practical work in a progressive, busy veterinary surgery.

### **2. Benefits to the employer**

The main benefit to the employer is the recruitment of qualified RCVS registered veterinary nurses at the end of the period of training who are bonded to the practice.

### **3. Benefits to the provider**

The main benefit to the centre is the opportunity to work closely with employers to provide an industry relevant and professional qualification. It also benefits from the provision of a regular intake of learners and clinical coaches for training.



<b>Awarding organisation:</b>	<b>Reaseheath College (validated by Harper Adams University)</b>
<b>Qualification name:</b>	<b>Foundation Degree in Dairy Technology</b>
<b>Employer involvement:</b>	<b>Mandatory</b>

## **The qualification**

The Foundation Degree aims to provide “comprehensive dairy training” involving “studying dairy theory, science and practical skills” in addition to “working with some of the country’s leading companies”, to “produce world-class staff for tomorrow’s dairy industry”. It caters for dairy processing and manufacturing personnel from a range of ages (18-47) and at different stages of their careers.

The learners’ learning is divided into formal study at the College and “hands on” training in the industry where their theoretical skills can be put into practice. The course covers a wide range of topics:

- Dairy theory, science and practical skills
- Production engineering
- Logistics
- Supply chain

For the duration of the qualification, membership of the dairy industry’s professional association, the Society of Dairy Technology, is provided for all learners.

## **The nature of employer involvement**

The Foundation Degree, launched six years ago with support of the awarding organisation Harper Adams University, involves substantial employer communication and collaboration. Key industry employers regularly deliver teaching sessions and guest speaker presentations. Learners also benefit from employer-site field trips.

The Level 4 Foundation Degree in Dairy Technology is an example of a qualification type in which employer involvement is a fundamental requirement. Dairy businesses contribute to its design and assist in its delivery and assessment.

Learners follow a structured work and training programme during their “hands on” training with their employer. Regular contact between the College and the employer ensures that the learners’ theoretical knowledge is used during their work period.

Employers also provide learners with a mentor.

At the end of each teaching block, the employer is involved in three main activities:

1. Curriculum meeting where the employer discusses the learner's development and suggests any support they may require;
2. Operations meeting where workplace mentors discuss the learner's progress;
3. Procedure meeting where the learner and employer discuss the learner future career development.

All aspects of the qualification are reviewed in a deep industry analysis, or 'deep-dive', conducted approximately every three years, to ensure that it remains relevant to the dairy industry.

" We do not find that there is any resistance to (employer involvement) - employers are very willing to participate in curriculum design and also in lesson delivery. The emergence of the course was and still is a collaborative partnership between employer and college".

Awarding organisation

## **Benefits of employer involvement**

### **1. Benefits to the learner**

Learners are aware of the huge backing from their employers and, as a result, work hard and are less inclined to miss lessons. Therefore, less classroom management is required.

A level 5-6 programme is currently under development, owing to the pressure on dairy manufactures to use skilled staff and modern technologies.

### **2. Benefits to the employer**

Employers report that their staff that have completed the qualification have saved them money. The College receives regular updates from the employer so that learners can develop their career and learning can be tailored to suit the employer's needs.

### **3. Benefits to the provider**

The establishment of strong professional relationships between the College and employers in the dairy sector and regular employer updates ensures the large dairy

centre at the College is kept up-to-date on new/emerging technologies and practices.

<b>Awarding organisation:</b>	<b>City &amp; Guilds</b>
<b>Qualification name:</b>	<b>City &amp; Guilds Level 2 Diploma in Aviation Operations on the Ground (QCF)</b>
<b>Number:</b>	<b>501/0865/7</b>
<b>Employer involvement:</b>	<b>Mandatory</b>

## The qualification

The Diploma is an appropriate qualification for anyone working in an airport (partly due to the lack of other qualifications in that environment). The job roles this qualification is aimed at include those responsible for maintaining aircraft cleanliness, check-in staff and baggage handlers, passenger services staff and load planning officers.

To gain this qualification, learners must achieve 8 credits from mandatory units and 29 credits from optional units. The mandatory units comprise airside risk and hazard identification and assessment, and maintenance of aviation health, safety and security. Optional units offer a range of generic and aviation specialist courses<sup>67</sup>.

A major employer in the industry collaborated with City & Guilds and the Sector Skills Council to develop the qualification because it felt existing provision had historically fallen out of currency and was no longer fit for purpose. It is one of two industry organisations directly involved in delivering and assessing this qualification to their own employees, and offers support to other colleges and providers approved by the awarding organisation to deliver it.

The employer delivers the qualification to employees on the ground, using a college to draw down funding. It delivers and assesses the qualification itself.

## The nature of employer involvement

The qualification is not compulsory for the employer's staff but the company tends to recruit people who want to participate in training opportunities. Due to funding

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<sup>67</sup> Further information is available on the City & Guilds website under the 'Courses and Qualifications' section, under 'Travel, Tourism and Aviation'. See <http://www.cityandguilds.com/courses-and-qualifications/travel-tourism-and-aviation/airport-and-airline-services/4877-aviation-operations-on-the-ground/level-2>

circumstances, a certain ratio is established where the majority of employees are certified in this qualification and the rest are trained to the same level but not registered for certification.

The qualification is delivered only to learners aged 18 and above and is offered by a number of colleges. The employer offers to assist these colleges with delivery and ensure learners are up to speed with industry requirements. It also provides CPD and training opportunities for college staff, including training forums for tutors, to ensure the occupational competence of individuals responsible for teaching new learners.

The employer arranges airport visits for colleges. These visits last seven hours and start at 4am because that is a particularly busy time for airports and is a good time to conduct an observation. By introducing a workplace visit at a time where potential employees would be expected to be at work, it helps build awareness of the role and the demands on employees wanting to work in the sector. Observation is an important part of assessment – learners are assessed at check-in of all types of airline – legacy, low cost, high cost, etc. They are able to experience the process of getting to the airport from beginning to end, through baggage handling and security.

Where a college relationship is mature, the employer can provide teaching and learning materials but cannot always provide work experience to college learners because of issues relating to airport security. However, if a learner gains an achievement rate greater than 90%, the employer will automatically give them a job interview.

The employer delivers training to college learners in their own classrooms and aims to ensure that learners have employer contact and experience employer-led lifelong learning. Learners are also trained in skills which are much better taught in a work environment, such as fire training, and which can be added to a learner's evidence portfolio.

The employer's trainers are trained in a Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS) qualification as a minimum and all assessors and trainers also receive Training, Assessment, Quality Assurance (TAQA) training to deliver Diplomas since some occupational roles in the company have the opportunity to study Diplomas. The employer provides staff involved with training with workshops and supports them with both delivery and assessment of qualifications.

The employer reports that it is a challenge to build effective links with colleges/training providers since the onus is apparently on the latter to approach the company. This is despite the fact that the employer operates in over 25 airports across the UK.

## Benefits of employer involvement

### **1. Benefits to the learner**

Learners have a choice of pathway into employment, firstly they can complete a qualification at a college where there is a strong employer partnership or secondly learners can enter the industry with no qualifications and work up the ladder, via training opportunities such as this Diploma. Learners are provided with development opportunities to ensure the maximisation of their potential. Learners are given an insight into the industry and even where they choose not to enter it, they are equipped with basic employability skills that improve their prospects of finding employment elsewhere.

### **2. Benefits to the employer**

For the employer, the main benefit of this Diploma is the generation of competent and qualified staff motivated to deliver high standards. The aviation sector makes a significant contribution to the national economy and employees that become qualified in this sector will possess a range of transferable skills and progression opportunities.

### **3. Benefits to the provider**

The provider will fulfil its obligations for employer involvement and are likely to benefit in terms of their relationship with Ofsted. The relationship with the employer adds value to the provider by boosting their appeal to learners and ensuring learning outcomes are attuned to the requirements and standards of the industry.

<b>Awarding organisation:</b>	<b>NOCN</b>
<b>Qualification name:</b>	<b>NOCN Level 2 Diploma in Steelfixing Occupations (Construction) (QCF)</b>
<b>Number:</b>	<b>601/2022/8</b>
<b>Employer involvement:</b>	<b>Mandatory</b>

## The qualification

The qualification aims to respond to the recognised industry-wide lack of fit-for-purpose training for Steelfixing occupations. The Diploma, designed for inclusion in apprenticeship frameworks and developed in conjunction with the awarding organisation, one employer and three colleges, will be delivered in a minimum of 846 guided learning hours and will cover 11 mandatory units:

1. Operating Safe Working Practices when Fixing Insitu and Prefabricated Reinforcing Steel
2. Moving, Lifting, Handling and Storing Reinforcement Steel and Associated Materials, Equipment and Resources
3. Interpretation of Construction Drawings, Specifications and other Relevant Information Required when Fixing Steel Insitu
4. Fixing Insitu Reinforcing Steel
5. Interpretation of Construction Drawings, Specifications and other Relevant Information Required for Prefabricating Reinforcement Steel Sections
6. Manufacture and Installation of Prefabrication Reinforcement Steel Sections
7. Interpretation of Construction Drawings, Specifications and other Relevant Information Required for Cutting and Bending Reinforcing Steel to Shape
8. Cutting and Bending, Reinforcing Steel to Shape
9. Appreciation of ICT and 3D Building Information Modelling for Civil Engineering Operatives
10. Team Working in Construction
11. Self Management in Construction

To ensure standardisation, the Diploma's training specifications are very tightly written in order to prevent flexibility, and the specifications are fixed with limited flexibility.

A portion of the qualification delivery will be at the employer's own supplier's factory in South Wales; utilising the knowledge of the business' technical experts who are considered to be the best at delivering the practical content of the qualification. The

college will deliver the standard Health and Safety content; however it is mandatory that learners will complete 70% of practical learning in a workplace environment.

### **The nature of employer involvement**

All of the technical exercises involved in the Diploma have been created and developed by the employer and college tutors with input from a representative of other major civil engineering employers. The qualification was finalised recently and will be delivered from February 2014 onwards. A formal Civil Engineering Advisory Group has now been set up of employers with NOCN. This group will have oversight of the delivery of the qualifications in order to ensure quality to match employers' requirements.

Following a trainee introduction course in the college, learners who are successful and appointed by the employer will receive their company induction in the first week of employment. Apprentices will then spend 15 weeks in the college on practical and knowledge learning exercises. From here they will then go to site and start work as apprentices under supervision. During the work based learning period of around 12 months they will go back to college for 2 weeks periods in order to consolidate their knowledge skills before finally sitting a synoptic end test. If they pass this they will then become fully qualified steelfixers.

### **Benefits of employer involvement**

#### **1. Benefits to the learner**

Learners will benefit from a qualification that has been designed by members of the industry and so is considered fit-for-purpose. Upon the completion of the Diploma, they will also understand the expectations of the construction industry, and will immediately be of use on a construction site.

#### **2. Benefits to the employer**

For the employer, they will be involved in training a workforce that is ready and able to contribute immediately upon the completion of the Diploma. Employers will have certainty that individuals who have completed the qualification will all be of an equal standard.

#### **3. Benefits to the provider**

Through employer involvement, the college can emulate real-life situations. They will also benefit from employer support in sourcing appropriately skilled and qualified tutors, as it can be challenging for colleges to find an individual currently working in the industry who is willing to become a trained instructor. This challenge is particularly pertinent in steelfixing occupations, which can be very well-paid and therefore difficult to recruit from



into training roles.

<b>Awarding organisation:</b>	<b>1st4sport</b>
<b>Qualification name:</b>	<b>1st4sport Level 2 NVQ Certificate in Activity Leadership (QCF)</b>
<b>Number:</b>	<b>600/1201/8</b>
<b>Employer involvement:</b>	<b>Mandatory</b>

## The qualification

The qualification was developed by SkillsActive (SSC) in conjunction with industry experts including practitioners, employers, training providers and awarding organisations. The qualification has been available as a stand-alone qualification and as a component part of a level 2/Intermediate Apprenticeship since 1998. The employer has delivered this qualification since 1999 as part of their ongoing learning programme for employees.

The employer is in a unique position delivering this qualification as both an employer and the training provider for their employees. They do not offer training for external learners. The employer has over 20 activity centres across the UK and Europe. Roles are varied and include guest-facing hospitality, operational support roles, catering and reception, and activity leadership.

The qualification is one of a number of NVQ's SkillsActive developed to cover a range of job roles in Sport and Active Leisure sector.

The employer has between 100-130 learners on this qualification per year, with all learners being residential staff living onsite. Learners generally complete the qualification within 8-10 months, however since they are working seasonally, some learners will achieve the qualification in the following season.

The qualification is suited best to outdoor activity instructor roles for the employer. Mandatory units include preparing, leading and reviewing activity sessions, supporting the work of the learner's team and organisation, promoting health, safety and welfare in active leisure and recreation and supporting diversity and equality.

## The nature of employer involvement

The AO explained that while employer involvement is not an explicit requirement in the specification, it is mandatory in reality since learners must be employed and evidence such as risk assessments, products of work, witness testimony must be authenticated

by the employer. In addition, employers provide ongoing training to learners on an informal basis.

The employer's learning programme is predominately on the job, work-based learning with mentoring support and ongoing assessment to confirm occupational competence. This includes aspects of classroom delivery in small groups at each centre.

Methods of assessment include:

- Regular workplace observations
- Products of work
- Written and verbal questions
- Witness testimony
- Workbooks

The real value of the qualification is in the regular formal workplace observations supported by products of work. These assessments are undertaken by the learner's line manager who assesses learners against the required criteria, and provides both written and verbal feedback on improving performance.

Every learner has a Personal Development Plan, reviewed every 3-4 weeks depending on operational priorities. A formal review is then undertaken every 10 weeks, with action points agreed from observations and based on progress with the workbook. Every learner has the same target: to achieve the qualification in 8-10 months, with a Training Plan detailing key learning milestones.

Three main challenges have been encountered in delivering and assessing the qualification in-house:

1. Line managers know the learners and the job, and are therefore in the best position to undertake assessments. However, the challenge lies in ensuring Line managers are trained, competent and confident to undertake the assessments. This requires them to hold work-based assessor qualifications.
2. Allocating line managers' suitable time off-rota to carry out assessments can be challenging.
3. Due to the nature of the industry and business, seasonality can affect completion rates by learners.

## Benefits of employer involvement

### 1. Benefits to the learner

Because the qualification is practically-based, learners can demonstrate all or most aspects required to achieve the qualification in the workplace. The knowledge learned is directly relevant to the job role and can be demonstrated; this suits learners typically attracted to outdoor activity roles who may not have previously fully engaged in traditional 'classroom-based' learning and assessment.

This qualification confirms the learners' competence within this role, and is also a credible stepping stone to other leisure-related qualifications as well as enhancing CVs for employment in the sport and active leisure industry.

### 2. Benefits to the employer/provider

- High quality trained and developed staff which are competent within their job role.
- Re-enforcing the organisations operating procedures and industry operating standards.
- Investing in staff, to identify progression routes and career pathways within the industry

<b>Awarding organisation:</b>	<b>Central YMCA Qualifications (CYQ)</b>
<b>Qualification name:</b>	<b>CYQ Level 4 Certificate in Weight Management for Individuals with Obesity, Diabetes Mellitus and/or Metabolic Syndrome</b>
<b>Number:</b>	<b>600/6752/4</b>
<b>Employer involvement:</b>	<b>Mandatory</b>

### The qualification

The CYQ “Level 4 Certificate in Weight Management for Individuals with Obesity, Diabetes Mellitus and/or Metabolic Syndrome” provides understanding of Obesity, Diabetes Mellitus and Metabolic Syndrome and prepares learners to plan and deliver safe and effective weight management courses<sup>68</sup>.

The course is designed for people who have achieved a Level 3 Certificate in Exercise Referral for Specific Controlled Conditions or a Level 3 Diploma in Exercise Referral (or equivalent). The qualification is suitable for level 3 advanced instructors and personal trainers and those wishing to become a specialist instructor at level 4 and facilitates entry at this level onto the Register of Exercise Professionals (REPS).

On completion of the qualification, learners will have developed skills in planning and delivering physical activity components as part of weight management programmes and, designed, reviewed and adapted weight management programmes. Assessment of the qualification is conducted through a number of elements which include coursework, portfolio of evidence, practical demonstration/assignment and written examination.

The qualification is part of a suite accessed by fitness professionals, and responds to demand from the market – either self-employed individuals, or those working in the fitness industry – for these professionals to be qualified in the important behavioural aspects of weight management.

Industry interaction is a mandatory requirement of the Certificate. Tutoring teams must

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<sup>68</sup> Details of this qualification: <http://www.cyq.org.uk/qualifications/level-4-qcf/certificate-in-weight-management#>.

<b>Awarding organisation:</b>	<b>Central YMCA Qualifications (CYQ)</b>
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include a practising or former NHS clinical or healthcare specialist from a relevant specialism (such as a physiotherapist or nurse specialist) who is involved in the delivery of contact time. This can consist of blended learning (including e-learning) but, where this occurs, this must be interactive and in real time.

The tutor team must also include a REPS registered exercise instructor with a minimum of 6 months' relevant experience, qualified to at least Level 3 in exercise referral and who holds or is working towards a Level 4 qualification in the specialist area. This individual must be present throughout the direct delivery of contact time.

A final requirement is that the tutor team include an appropriately qualified assessor and internal verifier with recent experience/understanding and ideally a qualification in the specialist area.

### **The nature of employer involvement**

The qualification is delivered by a small number of training providers, including the provider interviewed which specialises in delivering qualifications for the UK exercise and fitness industry. For the delivery of the Certificate, this provider fulfils the role of both centre and employer, through the operation of a specialist clinic.

Many of the learners are either in employment or they are looking for employment with the local health authority; most will complete the course in a year but it is possible to achieve the qualification in 12 weeks. The course is delivered via blended learning, through case study work and block work placements each of 5 days' duration.

Employer involvement is substantial, with learners required to include real clients in their learning, bringing them along to sessions and involving them in practical learning. Clients are also involved in the delivery of assessed seminars, with learners providing information to groups of patients through verbal presentation.

The Certificate was originally developed in response to demand from employers, as the Level 3 qualification in nutrition was considered to "stop short" of employer requirements in this particular specialist area. In addition to coverage of nutrition, the Certificate crucially includes a focus on the underlying behavioural aspects considered key to overeating, and diseases such as diabetes mellitus type 2.

### **Benefits of employer engagement**

#### **1. Benefits to the learner**

Employer involvement allows those working in the industry to identify a clear career progression route from the qualification. Level 4 is considered a high level qualification

<b>Awarding organisation:</b>	<b>Central YMCA Qualifications (CYQ)</b>
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in line with a knowledge base at undergraduate level but in a vocational programme. Through employer interaction and use of real-life case studies it visibly leads to job opportunities in health, exercise and fitness in both the public and the primary care sector. Learners are given the opportunity to develop the crucial, softer client-facing skills required in specialist roles.

## **2. Benefits to the employer**

As learners will draw on real-life cases, involving clients – including those from the primary care sector<sup>69</sup> – employers can be assured that learners have developed real practical skills and knowledge. This acts to build trusting relationships with the primary care sector, and helps to achieve government health targets and tackle a growing national health problem.

## **3. Benefits to the provider**

Employer involvement offers tangible benefits to the centre; through employer feedback the centres are able to ensure that learners achieve vocational training that meets the needs of the employer and benefit themselves from enhanced opportunities and widened job prospects. This is facilitated by maintaining channels of communication with employers. The centre is also assured that learners are gaining the necessary occupational competence, work experience, knowledge and employability skills through hands-on contact with potential clients.

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<sup>69</sup> This may include primary care trusts, GP consortiums and diabetic clinics, among others.





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