

# getting employers involved

improving  
work-based learning  
through employer links

report and good practice guidelines

**Sue Taylor**

# **Getting employers involved**

**Improving  
work-based learning  
through employer links**

**Report and good practice guidelines**

**Sue Taylor**

Published by the  
Learning and Skills Development Agency

[www.LSagency.org.uk](http://www.LSagency.org.uk)

Feedback should be sent to  
Information Services,  
Learning and Skills Development Agency,  
3 Citadel Place, Tinworth Street, London SE11 5EF  
Tel 020 7962 1066 Fax 020 7962 1258  
[enquiries@LSagency.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@LSagency.org.uk)

Registered with the Charity Commissioners

Editor: Annie Allen

Designers: Dave Shaw and Tania Field

Printer: Blackmore Ltd, Shaftesbury, Dorset

ISBN 1 85338 656 1

R1084/05/01/4000

© Learning and Skills Development Agency 2001

You are welcome to copy this publication  
for internal use within your organisation.  
Otherwise, no part of this publication may  
be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system,  
or transmitted in any form or by any means,  
electronic, electrical, chemical, optical,  
photocopying, recording or otherwise, without  
prior written permission of the copyright owner.

**Note**

The Learning and Skills Development Agency  
was formerly known as FEDA.

# Contents

Acknowledgements	IV
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2 Getting employers involved</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3 Resources to do the job</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>4 Preparing for learning at work</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>5 Supporting effective learning in the workplace</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>6 Supporting learners' personal development</b>	<b>25</b>
Useful publications, contacts and websites	<b>27</b>
<b>Appendix 1</b> Case study leaders and sites	<b>29</b>
<b>Appendix 2</b> Developing good practice: key actions	<b>30</b>
<b>Appendix 3</b> Employers involved in the study	<b>32</b>
<b>Appendix 4</b> External Advisory Group	<b>32</b>

## **Acknowledgements**

The Agency is grateful to Nacro and YMCA training managers for their constructive and informed contribution to the development of the good practice guidelines. We are also indebted to trainees at Nacro and YMCA training centres, who took part in case study interviews to help inform us about their experience of work-based learning.

Our particular thanks are due to Christa McGrath, Head of Quality and Development, Nacro, and to Diana Beardsell, National Training Systems Manager, YMCA Training, who gave willing advice at all stages of the project. Listed in an appendix to this report are the names of employers who gave us valuable information and guidance by attending an early workshop to plan the case studies, by giving up time to take part in case study interviews, or by serving as members of our external advisory group. Finally, we gratefully acknowledge the role played by our panel of external advisers, who helped to validate and refine the results of the project and whose names are also listed in an appendix.

# Introduction

# 1

## Our aims

These guidelines aim to show what can be done to engage employers successfully in work-based learning programmes.

They identify key aspects of effective employer involvement in work-based learning, accompanied by case study examples and suggestions for extending practice. The guidelines are designed particularly for training providers running government-funded, work-based learning programmes and for employers working with them. They have broader relevance for all training providers and employers engaged in learning in the workplace.

In addition, the guidelines will interest local agencies that can help to build effective education–industry links, such as local Learning and Skills Councils, the Employment Service, Careers and Guidance Services, Connexions Partnerships, the Small Business Service and others.

## Why guidelines are needed

We start with one conviction. Well-planned, on-the-job learning, with active employer involvement, leads to a better learning experience for learners and better outcomes in terms of their work-related skills and employability.

Inspection evidence summarised in the annual reports of the Chief Inspector of the Training Standards Council shows that there is much scope for closer coordination between on- and off-the-job learning. Employers can be highly influential in making this happen.

Although effective practice certainly exists, the features which define it, and examples demonstrating how it works, are poorly articulated. It is therefore difficult to replicate best practice or to develop better practice.

The need for improvement is urgent, in view of the government's emphasis on workforce development to fuel economic growth. This message has particular significance for disadvantaged areas of the country, where helping local people to improve their employability is crucial in tackling the problems of social and economic disadvantage.

As research by the government's Social Exclusion Unit has found, 'for most people, the prospect of employment, or of better-paid or more stable employment, is much the most powerful incentive to improve their skills' (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999). Residents of socially disadvantaged areas 'believe they have nothing to gain from improving their skills and that, no matter what they learn, it will make no difference to their prospects, in the labour market or more generally' (op. cit.). The visible involvement of employers in work-based learning initiatives can begin to make an impact on expectations and achievement.

## **How the guidelines and case study illustrations were produced**

The guidelines were written by staff at the Learning and Skills Development Agency (the Agency), following consultation with a number of organisations interested in work-based learning, including employers and training providers. In particular, Nacro (the crime reduction charity) and YMCA Training (part of the Young Men's Christian Association in England), worked on behalf of the Agency to conduct research into good practice. Case studies of practice by Nacro and YMCA were augmented by examples from members of our panel of advisers.

Nacro and YMCA are large training organisations that prepare learners for a range of occupational sectors. Among their clients are adults and young people who need substantial help to gain qualifications and to get and keep a job. These clients may pose particular challenges both for trainers and employers. The terminology to describe learners needing substantial help varies. Young people at school may be referred to as having special educational needs, while adults and young people in further education colleges may be described as having learning difficulties and disabilities, and those in work-based learning – particularly people with moderate learning difficulties – as having special training needs. While some aspects of good practice identified by Nacro and YMCA derive from their focus on these types of clients, we believe that the guidelines have much wider relevance.

In consultation with Nacro and YMCA, the Agency compiled a set of draft criteria for best practice in employer involvement in work-based learning. Four Nacro and four YMCA training centres were then selected as case study sites and each Nacro centre was 'paired' with a YMCA centre. Lead staff from the two organisations used the draft criteria in a critical appraisal of their provision, supported by the Agency.

The process worked in the following way. Training managers from each of the eight sites reviewed their practice with colleagues. A manager from the partner organisation then conducted a case study, involving three elements: interviews with employers, learners and training centre staff. This process was repeated for each of the eight case study sites. Key outcomes were reviewed by the whole team of training managers and subsequently by a team of external advisers, working with the Agency.

The case study sites are listed in Appendix 1. Taken together, they cater for a broad spectrum of clients, from mixed-ability adult learners to young people requiring help with literacy and numeracy or more substantial support. They represent a wide range of training activity, including, for example, pre-vocational courses and training in child care, retail and distribution.

An Advisory Group comprising representatives of a range of organisations (see Appendix 4) reviewed the outcomes of the case studies and assisted the Agency in drafting the guidelines.

## How to use the guidelines

The guidelines are intended to help training providers and employers assess and improve the quality and effectiveness of employer involvement in work-based learning.

They can be used:

- by individual training providers, to evaluate their own practice
- by teams of training staff looking for ways to strengthen their links with employers and extend or enhance the work-based element of their learning programmes
- by employers, to consider how they and their staff, particularly those at supervisory level, can become involved in constructive relationships with training providers
- by employers wishing to enhance their own workforce development practices, either in-company, in association with a training provider, or through links with trade unions
- by Learning Partnerships and other local groups who wish to build productive links between education/training and the local labour market.

We stress that the guidelines do not aim to cover every aspect of good practice in work-based learning. Many aspects of good practice should be routine matters – such as compliance with legislative requirements. Employer involvement is one dimension of effective work-based learning: we have chosen to focus on ways in which this aspect can be enhanced.

Each section of the guidelines contains a short introduction, followed by key actions to help develop good practice. These are illustrated by case study examples drawn from our work with Nacro and YMCA, as well as examples from other recommended sources. Suggestions for employers are listed, and each section concludes with further ideas for training providers.

The aim throughout is to show the variety of ways in which employers can be involved and how their engagement can be used to improve the quality of learning.

Readers will judge which of the features of good practice are most relevant to their area of work. For example, they may be working with learners on work-based learning programmes, or with those on short-term work taster or pre-vocational work experience, or with employees on apprenticeships, all of whom have different needs.

Employers will also differ in their demands and expectations: some will expect learners to arrive ‘job ready’, while others may be more willing to develop and nurture learners as they might their own employees. Some learners will already be employees.

Training providers will experience varying degrees of success in securing active employer involvement – while these guidelines show that providers can do much to build effective relationships, the outcome is not always under their control. Where employer links are not ideal, providers can take steps to enhance the arrangements or to substitute for workplace activities that may be missing.



# Getting employers involved

# 2

The benefits of active employer involvement are shown in better learning and increased employability for learners:

## **Better learning**

- The benefits to learners that derive from effective links between theory and practice are well documented (see, for example, Training Standards Council 2000(a) and QSI Consultants publications). Such links are best developed when communication between employers and learning providers is well established.
- Involving employers helps reinforce theory with practical experience by providing opportunities to apply and test understanding.
- Close links with employers help increase learners' motivation and commitment to completing a learning programme successfully, by providing clear goals to aim for and demonstrating the value placed on learning by the employer or workplace supervisor.

## **Increased employability**

- Enabling learners to apply knowledge in real situations should develop their work-related skills and make them more attractive as employees.
- Involvement with learning makes it possible for employers to recruit staff who are familiar with the company's culture and trained or ready to be trained in skills directly related to their business operations.

## **Challenges facing training providers and employers**

Getting employers involved is challenging. Training providers can face a variety of problems, from a lack of commitment to learning on the part of some employers, to concerns about the difficulties, for both tutors and workplace supervisors, of coping with learners who may need substantial support.

These difficulties may be more pronounced when training providers are attempting to find work-based learning opportunities for ‘harder to help’ learners such as ex-offenders, people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties, young people who have left school without qualifications, and people from socially excluded groups. It can be a very demanding task.

Employers may perceive a number of barriers to getting involved. For example:

- They may lack the necessary time to get involved in planning and reviewing on-the-job learning.
- They may be uncertain about who takes responsibility for supporting learners.
- Many draw a distinction between on- and off-the-job learning, viewing the former as their role and the latter as that of the training provider.
- The technical language of learning, assessment and qualifications may be off-putting.
- Tight budgets for all aspects of learning may limit the time and resources available.
- Time spent on education and qualifications may not be seen as commercially rewarding.
- The demands of learners may be thought to conflict with those of other workers.
- Employers may be deterred by the background history of some learners (such as ex-offenders, drug users, those who have a poor record of work attendance or have been dismissed by another employer).

## **Adopting a corporate approach: the way forward**

Such challenges can be overcome and perceptions changed. Our case studies show that the key to success lies in the training provider developing a positive attitude throughout the organisation towards the goal of involving employers.

This has very practical consequences:

- adopting a corporate approach, by making it the job of every trainer (not just the placement officer) to help build relationships with employers
- seeking openings to develop new work-based learning opportunities
- ‘marketing’ the benefits that employers can gain from taking on learners.

Though the approach is corporate, the working relationship between individuals is absolutely critical.

The elements of good practice range from very simple steps, such as encouraging trainers to send letters of thanks to employers, to ascertaining whether the training provider can offer learning opportunities for the employer’s own staff, in IT, for example. The quality of relationships between training providers and employers is all-important in sustaining involvement. One of the training managers who conducted our case studies wrote that the relationship should be ‘cooperative, honest, informative, supportive’, with the added ingredient of a shared sense of humour.

## **Convincing the employer: business advantages**

Clearly, employers will want to be convinced, not only that they have the capacity to provide appropriate learning support to learners, but also that there are sound commercial arguments for investing time in learning activities. When seeking to collaborate with employers, trainers need to be able to explain clearly what will be required, what the cost implications may be and what support employers can expect in return from the training provider.

Trainers can also help employers appreciate the advantages of taking part in learning. Our case studies suggest that employers can benefit from:

- having an input to planning the content of learning programmes run by local providers. This can help indirectly to ensure that programmes are in tune with local business needs
- working with training providers to ensure that learners have prior knowledge of the job and are equipped with essential skills from the start
- the opportunity to ‘grow their own staff’, by employing learners at the end of their on-the-job learning period. By getting involved in work-based learning and supervising learners, the employer is able to help them adapt to the culture of the organisation and develop work habits and skills that the employer values. Learners who make a successful transition to employment with the supervising employer can help improve productivity in the company. As one of our case study reports observes, employers see this as ‘investing in the future of the business’
- learning the skills of supervision, guidance and mentoring that can be applied to employed staff as well as learners. Some employers may be willing for their staff to train as work-based assessors
- discovering that they can put extra, trained help to good use, thus potentially carrying more business. This may apply particularly to small and micro businesses
- receiving expert advice from the training provider, for example, on the legislative requirements relating to health and safety and equal opportunities, that affect employees as well as learners
- taking part in courses offered by the training provider.

There may be a difficult case to argue in circumstances where training providers are seeking work experience for individuals who lack skills and qualifications and require a good deal of support to enable or encourage them to stay in a job. However, our case studies suggest that these are not insuperable barriers:

- Some employers may welcome the opportunity to demonstrate a commitment to social inclusion or may be persuaded of the value of this. As an illustration, helping ex-offenders find a route back into employment shows a commitment to equality of opportunity.
- All employers stand to benefit from an increase in skills in the local labour market. Though some may not see it as their responsibility to contribute to ‘upskilling’, influential local alliances of business, training and careers organisations could help change this view. A company’s local reputation could be a decisive factor. For some companies, there may be a ‘licence to operate’ issue, which could be assisted by their visible involvement with ‘hard to help’ groups.

- Employers may find that they can successfully train and then employ people whom they would not normally have considered employing. Encouraging this wider outlook can help employers experiencing difficulties in recruiting skilled staff.
- It is worth noting that, when the government contributes to the cost of work-based learning, 'it expects employers and placement organisations to take positive steps to encourage and include in training those groups that are often excluded from training and work' (QSI Consultants, 2000).
- Employees, particularly those with management or supervisory roles, may extend their skills and qualifications by working successfully with people with disabilities and learning difficulties.

*As a result of acting as mentor and supervisor to a young person with special training needs on a **Nacro** learning programme, one employee was promoted in recognition of her new skills. The young person was employed to fill the vacancy and a new learner was taken on.*

## **Knowing the best way to get involved: employer choices**

An important point to emphasise is that employers can be involved with work-based learning in a variety of ways and care should be exercised in selecting the most appropriate in each case.

Some may have the capacity for continuing involvement at a high level: regularly providing openings for learners, for example, or participating in local and national strategic planning and consultation processes relating to skill development. Some may be able to do this from time to time or not at all. These employers may be interested to take part in other ways, such as visiting the training centre to give a talk or review a learning programme, or perhaps responding to occasional requests for expert advice on local labour market and skills questions.

Training providers are likely to work with a 'core' group of employers who are regularly involved in a very direct way, while at the same time building links with a much wider group of employers. Where the level of employer involvement is less than ideal, training providers will need to compensate with supplementary learning activities.

Employers may wish to increase their level of involvement over time: some of those interviewed in our case studies who were already providing work-based learning opportunities indicated that they would like to be more involved, for example, in:

- advising on the recruitment of training provider staff
- observing teaching practice at the training centre, to learn more about the course content and the teaching process
- playing an increased role in planning the content of learning programmes, to help ensure that provision is in touch with new technology and other advances in tools and equipment.

## Developing good practice

*Note: there is no single blueprint – a range of approaches is needed to fit the different needs and expectations of large and small employers*

- Adopt a strategic approach to employer involvement: make sure that steps to involve employers are recognised as an important element in the training provider's business plan and culture.
- Keep in touch routinely with employers, whether or not there is a specific work-based learning opportunity in prospect.
- Develop a sensitive, intuitive and flexible style in responding to the different needs of employers and their varying capacity to be involved – whether as occasional or regular advisers, providers of work-based learning, etc.
- Develop a special training focus or 'niche' that will help employers to identify with the training provider. This may be a specific occupational or business focus, or an emphasis on benefit to the community.
- Offer services of direct benefit to the employer, such as advice on health and safety legislation.
- Maintain and use good records of employer contacts that are shared within the organisation.
- Make sure that commitments to employers are followed up, for example, by matching learners to suitable on-the-job learning opportunities as quickly as possible.
- Involve employers in monitoring/evaluating learning programmes and making a strategic input to planning the content of programmes.
- Seek to widen the base of employer support by using existing employer contacts and by networking with other agencies.
- Do not give up when contacts fail to produce results: be persistent and try other avenues.

## Case studies

At **Nacro Darlington** placing learners with employers is seen as an integral part of the overall business plan, rather than as an 'add-on'. Provider management and staff take part in a variety of external meetings with TECs, Employment Services, Careers Service, New Deal coordinators, etc., to ensure that they are up to date with local labour market trends. Trainers are asked to give feedback on their employer contacts at regular fortnightly meetings. Details of local employer contacts are kept on a database.

The training centre promotes a culture of treating both learners and employers as 'customers' and being prepared to 'go the extra mile' on their behalf. 'Every effort is made to ensure that every aspect of contact with the centre is positive.'

For one employer working with **Nacro Peterborough**, the main benefit of having a learner was that 'this was a potential member of staff' who could learn the employer's way of working – 'better than taking on someone who had gained "bad habits" from another employer'.

**YMCA Training Stowmarket** nurtures a bank of employers who regularly use its services – a considerable achievement for a training provider in a small country town with few employers. This training provider does not use placement officers and does not see a role for them. Success is built upon a tight-knit and experienced staff team – including trainers with substantial practical vocational experience – working closely to share leads. Trainers have developed a system that makes the whole process ‘as painless and effective as possible for employers’. Employers see advantages in using YMCA Training to recruit new members of staff and several who took part in the case study had taken on and employed candidates whom they would not have considered in open competition. The training provider’s annual ‘trainee of the year’ award attracts press coverage both for YMCA Training and for the employer.

**Nacro Slough** has a dedicated staff member responsible for building and maintaining employer relationships. She relies chiefly on telephone calls and visits, with some use of local business networks. Handouts and mail-shots are also used. At a strategic level, employer involvement is sought via open days and through a local ‘forum’.

At **YMCA Training, Irlam (Manchester)**, all employer contacts are recorded and notes made. A company contact sheet is completed to ensure that a consistent record is available for use when the relevant member of staff is not available. Employers receive annual ‘Quality Monitor’ questionnaires, which help the centre to review how learning programmes can be improved. Action plans are agreed, the meetings are minuted and data is checked for trends. In preparing for work-based learning, the YMCA Training policy documents on the legislative requirements for health and safety and equal opportunities are issued to all employers as a guide.

**Nacro Sandwell** has established a ‘niche market’ for learners with special needs. Employers contact the training centre in order to select learners for interview. This is the result of regular contact between the centre and employers, whether or not the employer is supervising a learner at the time. The objective is to encourage employers to make Nacro Sandwell the first port of call when a vacancy does arise.

As part of its work to build relationships with employers, this training centre also invites employers to attend its regular open days, when learners are presented with their certificates. The centre conducts regular reviews of its programmes, using questionnaires which all employers are invited to complete. Feedback is used to improve performance. Employers who need help in preparing health and safety and equal opportunities policies are offered local training.

**YMCA Training Croydon** circulates a twice-yearly newsletter to all its employer contacts in order to keep them up to date and maintain contact, whether or not they are actively involved in providing work-based learning opportunities.

Following a successful initiative by Walsall TEC, **WESTEC** in Bristol developed a Student Apprenticeship to link employers with young people who stay on at school or college after the age of 16. Employers are keen to train young people with NVQ3 potential, to sustain a quality workforce, particularly in terms of future managers, supervisors and technicians. Students have the opportunity to develop employability skills in a real working environment, through on-the-job learning one day per week with an employer, working on agreed vocational assignments. The apprenticeships, initially targeted on sectors with skill shortages, are managed by training providers in collaboration with school/college tutors, employers and students and can lead to Advanced Modern Apprenticeships.

**Knowsley Community College, Merseyside** serves one of the most deprived areas in the country. The college works with small companies such as Hansen Glass, where adult basic education courses are offered in workshop-style provision at the end of the working day. Learning centres for employees in major local companies – such as Littlewoods, Pirelli, Ethel Austin and Mersey Tunnels – offer courses in basic and key skills and IT. Negotiations with Trades Union Council (TUC) Bargaining for Skills staff and Jaguar resulted in the Jaguar X400 Skills for Employability Programme. Over two weeks, 833 employees were bussed in for an intensive 60-hour course, specially devised to improve literacy, numeracy and computer skills. Over 80 per cent of the participants achieved Open College accreditation (Further Education Funding Council, 2001).

**Lancaster Adult College – Employability Project.** Lancaster College has offered Job Quest programmes for long-term unemployed people, encompassing a wide range of personal and job-seeking skills. Partnerships with local organisations and employers resulted in human resource and personnel officers participating in simulated interviews and local companies offering work experience placements to trainees, who were enabled to gain qualifications in First Aid, Customer Care and ICT, as well as the Open College of the North West Job Seeking Skills Accreditation (Further Education Funding Council, 2001).

## What employers can do

- Get involved with the local Learning and Skills Council, the Learning Partnership or Education Business Link.
- Encourage the local Chamber of Commerce to develop a formal link with local training providers.
- Consider the indirect benefit to local businesses of working with ex-offenders. Statistics show that employment reduces the likelihood of re-offending.
- Consider the positive benefits of investing in training people with special training needs or with learning difficulties and disabilities. By accepting a wider spectrum of learners, businesses can increase the pool of potential employees and develop the supervisory skills of existing staff. Learners who receive good support for special training needs often repay that investment to become reliable and committed employees. Two case studies of Nacro trainees illustrate the point:

***John** had very limited, largely unsuccessful, work experience. He had spent a lot of time travelling and found it difficult to adjust to a settled life. He also had a drink problem. By a painful process of elimination, it was agreed that his trainer would look for a placement where he could work with animals. He was placed as a stablehand. With a great deal of support and encouragement from the stable owner and his trainer, he proved that he could work well with horses. He made such good progress and became so motivated that his work placement created a job for him. He has virtually stopped drinking and is now a conscientious and reliable employee.*

***Brian** had been unemployed for 10 years. He suffered health problems, made worse by morbid obesity, and was attending hospital. He had rarely been out of the house during the last 10 years, but he had expressed an interest in IT. Although his progress was slow, his trainer could see a gradual increase in his confidence. In addition to IT training, he received life-skills and job search training, which helped him communicate with others. Eventually he was confident enough to progress to a work placement with a national DIY store where he was able to use and develop his IT skills, which was an enormous boost to his self-confidence.*

*He continued to visit the hospital gym and succeeded in losing weight. His health improved. Brian applied for the next full-time office vacancy at the store, was interviewed and offered the job because they were so impressed by his progress.*

## **Further ideas for training providers**

- Contact employers periodically to find out their projected requirements for trainees, gauge numbers and occupational areas.
- Keep the database of employers up to date with brief details of any contact, eg the outcomes of visits by trainers to the workplace, phone calls, letters.
- Use the local press to place advertisements for workplace learning opportunities aimed at attracting potential learners. Naming companies with whom the training provider works closely, and perhaps using their logos, could encourage other companies to get involved.
- Make employer involvement a shared endeavour for placement officers and trainers. Keep momentum going by ensuring that work by placement officers (to secure offers of workplace learning opportunities) is followed up quickly by trainers to match suitable learners.
- Encourage trainers and placement officers to take part in events and support activities for local business people, such as small business clubs, Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise activities, and so on. Training provider staff may be able to join local networks as members or observers, and offer services such as hosting meetings and providing briefings on training and education matters, in return for the opportunity to take part in a regular exchange of information.
- Take soundings with individual employers regularly, to find out whether they would like to increase their level of involvement.
- Get involved in local strategic alliances and networks that include representatives of employers, training organisations and local agencies such as Careers and Employment Services.
- Make contact with trade unions. They may be in a position to facilitate contact with employers and workplaces.
- Seek support from relevant national training organisations (NTOs). These employer-driven bodies are expected to play a role in helping training providers become more responsive to labour market needs. NTOs are charged with formulating sector workforce development plans. Government is promoting their role (Department for Education and Employment, 2001). Training providers should establish links with NTOs, not only to ensure that their workforce development plans include action to support disadvantaged groups, but also to keep up to date with emerging skill requirements identified by the NTOs.

# Resources to do the job

# 3

Managing the interface between on- and off-the-job experience is crucial. The training provider (whether a company in-house trainer, a college, or a private or voluntary sector provider of training) needs to mediate between the employer and learner, as well as handle the often complex administration and quality assurance of schemes.

Two messages emerge strongly from our case study exercise:

- Involving employers effectively in work-based learning makes significant calls on the resources of training providers.
- If asked to highlight one particular resource, the skills of the training provider staff would be paramount.

To be effective, employer involvement needs to be treated as a central part of the training enterprise – a corporate commitment, not a bolt-on extra. This means ensuring staff are recruited with, and trained in, the skills and aptitudes to interact with employers, and the ability to identify and exploit opportunities for learning in the workplace. Resources to support these activities, in terms of appropriate time and materials, need to be put at their disposal.

## Sharing a commitment

Some of our case study sites employed placement officers who bore the main responsibility for initiating and developing relationships with employers. We found, however, that this model works best when – in addition to the work of the placement officer – all trainers in the company share a commitment to employer involvement and make it part of their job role. This is an important aspect of ‘relationship marketing’, which is itself vital in improving employer engagement in work-based learning.

Trainers can help encourage and support employer involvement in a variety of ways, depending on their particular responsibilities:

- securing learning opportunities with employers
- designing on-the-job learning
- liaising with work-based supervisors and line managers about the integration of on- and off-the-job learning
- conducting work-based assessment
- encouraging employer involvement in off-the-job learning, for example, by inviting employers to give talks at the training centre, and to join advisory/steering groups.

Effective information exchange between staff about their contacts with employers can be a powerful resource for spreading good practice. Up-to-date databases and e-mail networks will support this exchange.

## Developing good practice

- Help staff acquire the skills and attributes needed to be successful in engaging employers and working with them. Look for these skills and attributes in new recruits.
- Maintain staffing at levels that allow a proper balance between centre-based learning, on-the-job learner support (by the training provider), and activities to engage and support employers.
- Put in place good staff development, training and mentoring.
- Prepare, maintain and use good quality documentation to support joint work with employers.
- Provide opportunities and facilities for trainers to share information and experience relating to employer links and to use these to benefit learners.
- Ensure that training centre premises and facilities inspire learners' and employers' confidence.
- Ensure right at the start that employers are aware of and able to offer the amount of staff time needed for effective supervision and support on the job.
- Provide good on-the-job opportunities and facilities for learners to learn from their workplace experience.

*Remember – good resources will not make a difference unless training providers and employers know how to use them to make an impact on learning.*

## Case study

Staff at **YMCA Training, Irlam (Manchester)** emphasised the importance of using good quality documents throughout the organisation, both locally and nationally. Each employer is provided with a work book containing relevant information, including details on NVQ standards. Paperwork should be 'professionally produced, simple to use and minimise the time required by the employer'. A high standard of documentation can be crucial when dealing with national employers. The general ethos of the Irlam training centre encourages good communication between staff, resulting in peer support across programmes.

## **What employers can do**

- Make senior staff aware of the company's involvement in training.
- Ensure that key staff have time to support learners.
- Provide suitable facilities, equipment and support for learners in the workplace.
- Where lack of staff resource is the main constraint on offering work-based learning opportunities, find out whether such opportunities can be developed through a consortium approach involving several local employers in related occupations.

## **Further ideas for training providers**

- Training providers may be able to find capacity for existing staff to increase their employer involvement by switching resources from one type of activity to another.
- There is potential for training providers to gain additional support and extend their resources by tapping into the local activities of the Small Business Service (eg 'piggy-backing' on events that bring employers together); and by seeking the support of the local Learning and Skills Council.

# Preparing for learning at work

# 4

Good preparation and planning by training providers, employers and learners are essential to the success of work-based learning. For the training provider, there is much more to this than checking that legislative requirements – health and safety, equal opportunities – are met, though these requirements must always be high on the agenda. For example, training providers have a specific duty to challenge actions by employers that could affect equality of opportunity for learners.

Three particular areas to keep in mind when preparing for learning at work are:

- matching the job and the learner
- knowing the learner's support needs
- knowing the industry.

## Making a good match

Making a sound judgement about the skill requirements both of the job and the learner is vital, whether the learner is an employee, or someone looking for a work-based learning opportunity.

In the case of those who are looking for workplace learning opportunities, it is important to 'match' learners and specific openings, to avoid frustrating the employers' expectations or risking drop-out by learners. This should be done through initial assessment and induction.

Some training providers organise flexible 'work tasters', trial periods or pre-placement visits to help ensure a good match between the learner on the one hand and the employer and job role on the other. Work tasters can help learners who are uncertain of their vocational interests as well as those who need to develop their 'work readiness'. Trial periods allow either the employer or the learner to terminate the arrangement or try a change of direction if it does not go to plan.

Training providers can also assist matching by encouraging employers to adopt a broader view of the kind of learner they can accommodate. This may mean challenging stereotypes, particularly if the employer's criteria would lead to discrimination on grounds of gender, race or disability.

*Nacro staff encourage and support clients with offending backgrounds to declare their offences to employers. As employers learn more about Nacro's work, they trust the training provider to ensure that neither the client nor the employer is put at risk, and that there is a close match between the client and the workplace opportunity.*

In areas where there are shortages of openings for work-based learning in particular sectors and perhaps a limited choice for learners, our case studies emphasise the need to look carefully at transferable skills. For example, a learner who aspires to work in a computer firm may be suitable for openings in a whole variety of jobs that include IT-related activities; one who is mainly interested in retail may be encouraged to work in other sectors with an emphasis on customer service. Training providers need to help learners recognise that although in some cases the vacancy may not precisely match their ideal job destination, they can gain from developing employability skills. This message may be particularly relevant for learners who have reservations about being placed on pre-vocational courses.

## Support needs

The training provider should take care to ensure that the individual's learning requirements will be covered – whether or not he or she is working towards a qualification – and that learning experiences in the workplace link well with theoretical training conducted at the training centre or elsewhere.

Where learners have particular, known support needs, such as basic skills difficulties or dyslexia, these should be discussed in advance, with the learner's consent, preferably in a three-way conversation involving the learner, the employer and the training provider. The training provider needs to find out what level of support the employer and fellow workers are likely to need in order to give effective supervision.

Travel distance to the workplace, or the level of the training allowance, may prove barriers for some learners and undermine their motivation to attend. In one of our case studies, learners working in a company in which they were surrounded by fairly well-paid workers expressed concern that their allowance was too low. Basic issues such as these need to be discussed and resolved, as early as possible in the process.

## Knowing the industry

Learners need to know the requirements of the industry in question. This can range from legislative requirements and specific knowledge and skills, to issues of dress code and the wearing of jewellery.

It also includes understanding the physical and emotional demands of working in particular occupations. For example, a construction industry employer working with **Nacro Darlington** indicated that before starting any work-based learning in the industry, learners would require a health and safety certificate, a manual handling certificate, personal protective equipment (PPE) and reasonable communication skills.

Training providers must therefore maintain up-to-date knowledge about the main industries and work environments where they are placing learners or supporting employees in learning. This should be a matter for all trainers who are supervising learners in the workplace, not solely a responsibility of placement officers, since trainers need to be in a position to help learners develop the requisite skills before starting a job or embarking on work-based learning.

*A suggestion made by one of our case studies is that employers should be invited to visit the training provider's premises to give talks for learners and staff. This will help trainers to put in place any 'pre-placement' training that is needed. Another suggestion is for the training provider to produce industry-specific handbooks or manuals, which are kept up to date and used by all training centre staff involved with learner development. Such material could be put to good use in a pre-employment training programme, for example.*

## Keeping it simple

All of our case studies stressed that the training provider should minimise the burden of paperwork on employers and 'keep it simple'. Excessive bureaucracy can discourage employers from getting involved.

### Developing good practice

- Help employers to understand the learners' courses and qualification requirements.
- Match learners to employers and prepare thoroughly on both sides, through initial assessment.
- Offer work tasters, trial periods, pre-placement training and good induction.
- Prepare an individual learning plan for each learner, at the start.
- Prepare clear, simple information for employers.
- As trainers, keep up to date with industry requirements.
- Give authoritative advice on the legislative requirements covering learners, such as health and safety and equal opportunities.

## Case studies

Employers working with **YMCA Training in Leeds** are given two weeks' free trial which can be extended if necessary, before any financial arrangements are agreed.

Course tutors undertake 'NVQ mapping' to ensure that the full range of NVQ experiences needed can be gained on the job. If gaps are identified, plans are made early on to address them and if necessary to move the learner to another employer to cover certain elements.

**YMCA Training Irlam (Manchester)** conducts a thorough four-week assessment of learners. Tools used include the Morrisby Passport, initial assessment, basic skills, vocational area assessment and personal effectiveness grading sheets. This process gives an excellent indication of the learner's individual needs and provides the foundation for a training and development plan for the employer. A learner who joined YMCA Training Irlam as an administration learner quickly found that she was not suited to this and was able to change to a retail programme. Workplace 'taster' opportunities are used regularly by this training centre and can last from as little as one day up to one month.

Trainers at **Nacro Sandwell** conduct an analysis of the needs of each learner and vet the workplace to ensure that the employer is able to accommodate clients with specific training needs. This ensures that the most suitable learner can be placed as soon as practicable. It also lowers failure rates.

**Herefordshire Group Training Association (HGTA)** has encouraged strong links between employers with whom it works, by bringing them together in regular meetings. The result is that, when learning opportunities in a particular workplace are restricted, so that learners cannot develop the full breadth of skills required, the company can arrange for them to spend a short period with another employer (QSI Consultants, 2000).

## What employers can do

- Make sure that work-based learning is managed at a sufficiently senior level, so that staff have the power to make changes if needed.
- Work with learners and training providers to identify learners' needs, for example, by listing the skills learners must acquire and the tasks they must do to develop these skills.
- Help design individual learning plans to meet learners' skill needs and address any risks they might face at work. Look for suitable learning opportunities in the workplace and ensure these are recorded in the plan.
- Consider whether all the necessary equipment and other resources are available in the workplace or whether supplementary resources will be needed (eg a laptop or specialist software).
- Make it clear to the training provider if there are aspects of learning that you are not in a position to cover and consider whether you can arrange a short period of experience with another company to fill the gap.
- Involve a workplace mentor in the planning process.
- Provide information on work schedules that the learner needs to know about.
- Let the training provider and learner know about any in-house training you provide that might complement individual learning plans and help learners to make progress.
- Make sure that staff working alongside the learner are well briefed about what he or she is doing, and that they understand how to offer support.

## Further ideas for training providers

- Encourage an awareness among learners of how they can contribute to a positive equal opportunities culture in the workplace. If possible, turn this into a practical assignment.
- Where it is found that the employer is not up to date with equal opportunities policies, the provider can offer their own policy statement for consideration, or recommend specific local assistance or learning materials.
- As an extra service, offer to support the employer with the administrative aspects of training and qualifications and possibly with the recruitment of new staff.
- If there appears to be a mismatch between qualification requirements and employers' needs, training providers should report this to the relevant NTO.
- Make links with trade unions (many of whom are themselves involved in offering work-based learning opportunities), to find out whether they can assist with pre-recruitment activity/training. Many unions have expertise in health and safety, equal opportunities and employment rights, and in handling difficult work situations.

# Supporting effective learning in the workplace

# 5

Once a work experience or training place is in operation, three key issues for training providers and employers to address are:

- What steps should be taken to help learners develop relevant skills and knowledge while learning on the job?
- What support should the learner be given so that maximum benefit is derived from the learning experience?
- What is the best way to integrate learning on and off the job?

*‘Many young people leave before completing the programme, citing lack of employer support, the ability to get a job without the qualification, or difficulties with some aspect of the programme itself as major reasons for leaving.’*

Quality and Performance Improvement Division, 1999b

The lack of explicit employer support for learning – whether off the job or within the job role – appears to be an important factor in drop-out and non-completion. Good support will help ensure that learners ‘stay the course’ and successfully complete their period of on-the-job learning.

The spin-off for employers could thus be a larger pool of employable people, as well as in-house staff with a positive experience of supporting learners. Training providers will reap benefits from the greater willingness of employers to take on learners. The converse is also true: if learners drop out or make poor progress due to weak support, the reputation of training providers may be damaged and employers may become reluctant to repeat the experience. The business case for employers to become involved in work-based learning could be undermined.

## Developing good practice

- Synchronise on- and off-the-job learning, so that learners readily appreciate the relevance of theory to practical applications.
- Identify real and challenging opportunities for learning and problem solving on the job.
- Give the learner time on the job to maintain a 'learning log'. This should include practical examples of tasks undertaken, to demonstrate the progress the learner has made.
- Enable learners to reflect on the tasks they undertake in the workplace and the problems they encounter, in such a way that they build up their knowledge base and draw on it when needed. The learning log should assist this process.
- Enlist the active involvement of supervisors, mentors and peers (where appropriate) in the learning process.
- Where possible, involve trade union learning representatives in providing additional learning support. Union learning representatives often receive front-line advice and guidance training through the services of the TUC.
- Involve employers in reviewing learners' progress and achievement and planning the next steps.
- Respond to employers' needs and concerns, identified through effective feedback. This includes providing 'added value' training elements to meet employers' specific needs.
- If a placement runs into serious difficulty and breaks down, ensure that a full and timely response is made and that managers are involved.

## Case studies

At **YMCA Training Stowmarket**, trainers are regular visitors to the workplace. 'This all feels very natural, as if the trainers are an extension of the workplace.' Peripatetic assessors are used and the practice of obtaining workplace evidence of learning experience is encouraged. Emphasis is placed on turning workplace opportunities into jobs early in the programme. Learners receive a 'leavers' pack' and staff make strenuous efforts to secure employment for them or at least plan their next step.

At **Nacro Darlington**, every employer, learner and placement officer agrees and signs an action plan relating to the learner's qualification aims and the employer's needs. The plan sets out which learning activities the employer can support and highlights those the employer cannot. Any special support or special needs on either side – the learner's or the employer's – are noted in the plan along with agreed action. Occupational trainers are alerted to the learning activities that the employer is unable to support so that these can be covered at the training centre.

One employer linked with Nacro invites the placement officer, centre manager and other training provider staff to take part in an employer induction session for learners. The aim is to ensure that nothing is missed that could help the learner's confidence.

At **YMCA Training Irlam (Manchester)**, employers who are ‘hosts’ for work-based learning regularly provide ‘witness statements’ for use in learners’ portfolios of evidence. This training provider gave an example of how an employer’s specific needs for training are met: to help make retail and warehouse learners more employable, specific fork-lift truck training is given. YMCA Training Irlam also offers to pay for the employer’s staff to take training units to qualify as work-based assessors. The long-term aim is to promote learners’ progress by having full-time access to a qualified assessor.

At **Nacro Sandwell**, the feasibility of employment, extended work taster or re-direction is considered and planned throughout the training period. This involves weekly contact with the employer and the learner, with the trainer actively seeking feedback on progress from both parties. New and inexperienced learners are mentored by existing learners on work taster programmes.

Employers involved in work-based learning with **YMCA Training Croydon** are encouraged to take part in ‘Programme Reviews’ with staff and learners.

A **City Council** offered placement experience in its Engineering Services Directorate for young people with poor attendance records. Trade union learning representatives were trained as mentors (‘study buddies’) to assist the young people in both their work-based learning and in accessing the learning centre to write up their experience.

(Source: communication from NWTUC Bargaining for Skills Unit.)

**Smiths Industries Aerospace in Cheltenham** has a well-organised work-based learning plan and monitoring structure in place for apprentices, and mentors are seen as very much ‘outside the box’ – people who are there for the apprentices, who neither manage nor assess them, but help them more generally. The role is officially supported by the company. It’s a relationship that is driven by the needs of the apprentices, but also has benefits for the mentors (Quality and Performance Improvement Division, 1999b).

## What employers can do

- Show an interest in and encourage learning, for example, by allowing time for learning, discussing progress with the learner, introducing a reward system (based on prizes, pay or promotion).
- Arrange for an employee (other than the supervisor who is responsible for the learner) to act as mentor or role model. Mentoring can protect the company’s investment in learning, as well as provide an opportunity to develop its understanding of work-based programmes and the needs of learners. It is a motivating and challenging role for employees.
- Ensure that employees who become involved in mentoring and supporting work-based learners have access to appropriate training and development for their new role. It may be possible to involve mentors who are supported by the Union Learning Fund (see reference, page 28).
- If the company lacks the capacity to provide mentoring support, consider whether this can be arranged through collaboration with other employers locally.
- Encourage the learner to use the company as a case study in assignments.
- Ensure that individual learning plans and learning logs are kept up to date and used as working documents.

- Encourage learners to show an interest in off-the-job learning; help learners make links between on-the-job experience and off-the-job learning.
- Share lessons from learners' experience in the workplace with peers. For example, learners could be invited to give a very short de-brief to colleagues, explaining how they undertook a particular process, or handled a customer transaction. This could usefully demonstrate how to apply learning and improve performance.
- Play an active part in reviewing learners' progress and deciding what should be done to enable them to tackle more complex tasks.
- Extend to learners the training offered to the company's employees. This can improve the learners' employment prospects.
- Train workplace supervisors in learning techniques, or help them improve their skills in on-the-job training. Ensure that learners are placed with occupationally competent supervisors.
- Take part in learning activities, for example, by giving talks to learners at training centre premises.

## **Further ideas for training providers**

- Invite learners to give simple presentations to other learners at the training centre, outlining what they are doing in their work-based learning and why. This helps to check learners' understanding of their individual development plan. It may also motivate other learners.
- Reinforce feedback on performance in practical tasks or situations with references to underpinning theory. For example, comments on how a trainee maintains an attractive and clean workbench can be linked to health and safety requirements. Feedback on efforts to locate an out-of-stock product can be linked to customer care or stock control theory.
- Trainers will need to 'wean' learners away from a high degree of support to greater self-reliance as they near the end of their learning experience on the job.
- Look for opportunities at the workplace for learners to inform peers/supervisors.
- Arrange visits by employers to the training centre, to give 'industry talks' for learners and staff. Hearing the employer's perspective can make all the difference to learners' understanding of the expectations they will meet in the workplace. If the employer is offering work-based learning opportunities, the talk can lead to agreeing a structured plan for pre-placement training.
- Ensure that the individual learning plan includes specific tasks which involve the employer and/or that the employer/staff have an input to the plan.
- If, in spite of good support in the workplace and training centre, the learner decides to leave to take a job where training is not required, the training provider should if possible make contact with the new employer and encourage this firm to continue with the learning programme.

# Supporting learners' personal development

# 6

In addition to support for work-related learning, all learners will need support with personal development to a greater or lesser extent. This will include pastoral support and support in developing basic and key skills. The purpose of this additional support should be to assist learners to progress and achieve their learning goals. Weak pastoral support could mean, for example, that the learner fails to complete a period of work-based learning due to financial, housing or other practical difficulties. A lack of attention to key skills could result in the learner being unable to undertake certain tasks successfully and becoming frustrated or demotivated. Learners may need additional support to overcome a learning difficulty (such as dyslexia) in order to stay on course.

## Developing good practice

- From the start, make employers aware (wherever possible, without infringing confidentiality) of any problems that are likely to affect learners' performance in the workplace.
- Provide support for key skills development, based on an initial assessment of the learner's key skill requirements.
- Ensure that learners are able to secure expert professional advice and support in the case of significant difficulties.

## Case study

The additional support that Jane received for her dyslexia while at **YMCA Training, Leeds**, was really appreciated as she had dropped out of a previous programme with another training provider, due to lack of support. Jane's day nursery employer involved in the YMCA programme observed that she views her trainees as an investment requiring her commitment and support.

## **What employers can do**

- Offer financial support for items such as essential work clothes (overalls, uniform) and lunches taken on employer premises.
- Provide a supportive atmosphere, based on well-established policies and procedures to deal with equal opportunities, health and safety, bullying, etc.
- Ensure that supervisors understand their support roles.
- As far as possible, allow trainees access to the same support services as employees.
- Support learners if they feel their on-the-job experience does not suit them; if possible, help them to find alternative learning opportunities within the company.
- Provide the support of a mentor (in addition to the support provided by a workplace supervisor).
- Spot learners who are losing motivation or seem discontented and discuss with them the reasons why. It could be because the tasks assigned to them are too complex or, on the other hand, insufficiently challenging.

## **Further ideas for training providers**

- Find out about work by trade unions on basic skills. For example, the textile sector union KFAT (the Knitwear, Footwear and Apparel Trades Union) has been involved with employers in developing a basic skills/ESOL programme to help individuals become more employable and to assist employers with staff communication. USDAW (the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers) has been active in basic skills work in the retail sector. The TUC has developed an ICT-based package on basic skills.
- Training providers who offer a high level of support for personal development need to ensure that learners progressively become more self-reliant.

## Useful publications, contacts and websites

### Publications

Armstrong P and Hughes M. *Developing skills: realistic work environments in further education*. FEDA, 2000.

*Croner's health and safety at work*. Kingston upon Thames: Croner (updated quarterly).

Department for Education and Employment, Skills for Employment Division.  
*Building a stronger network: developing the role of national training organisations*.  
Sheffield: DfEE, 18 January 2001. Consultation paper available on  
[www.dfee.gov.uk/consultations/index.cfm?CONID=46](http://www.dfee.gov.uk/consultations/index.cfm?CONID=46)

Further Education Funding Council. *Demand Side Group Report*. FEFC, March 2001.

Health and Safety Executive. *Fire safety: an employers' guide 1999*. HSE Books, 1999, ISBN 01134 1229D.

Health and Safety Executive. *Five steps to risk assessment*. HSE Books, INDG 163 (rev. 1), free leaflet or ISBN 07176 15650 priced pack.

Health and Safety Executive. *Health surveillance at work*. HSE Books, 1999, HSG 61, ISBN 07176 1705X.

Health and Safety Executive. *Management of health and safety at work regulations 1999. Approved code of practice and guidance*. HSE Books, 1999, ISBN 07176 24889.

Health and Safety Executive. *Managing health and safety on work experience: guide for organisers*. London: HSE, June 1999.

Hughes M. *Quality improvement in the work-based sector. Summary report*. FEDA, 2000.

Hughes M and Stoner F. *Understanding and sustaining employability*.  
Learning and Skills Development Agency, 2000.

Quality and Performance Improvement Division. *Equality assurance: self-assessment for equal opportunities in training*. TEC National Council and Department for Education and Employment. Published by the Department for Education and Employment, 1999a.

Quality and Performance Improvement Division. *Workforce development: mentoring for work-based training*. Department for Education and Employment, 1999b.

QSI Consultants. *Developing good practice and guidance for training providers working with employers in the delivery of work-based training*. Prepared by QSI Consultants for the Department for Education and Employment, 2000 (enquiries to 01925 730963). Contains a disk-based *Model Employer Guide* to help training providers improve employers' understanding of their roles and responsibilities in work-based learning.

QSI Consultants. *Developing good practice and guidance in the training process*. Prepared by QSI Consultants for the Department for Education and Employment, 1999 (enquiries to 01925 730963).

Social Exclusion Unit. *Skills for neighbourhood renewal: local solutions. Final report of the Policy Action Team on Skills*. December 1999.  
Available on [www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/pat](http://www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/pat)

Training Standards Council. *Annual report of the Chief Inspector 1999–2000*.  
Training Standards Council. TSC, 2000a.

Training Standards Council. *Promoting equal opportunities: a survey report  
by the Training Standards Council*. Training Standards Council. TSC, 2000b.

## **Contacts and websites**

### **Learning and Skills Council**

[www.lsc.gov.uk](http://www.lsc.gov.uk)

### **Learning and Skills Development Agency**

[www.LSagency.org.uk](http://www.LSagency.org.uk)

### **Nacro**

[www.nacro.org.uk](http://www.nacro.org.uk)

### **National Mentoring Network**

The National Mentoring Network was set up in 1994 and is funded by membership fees and support from other sources, such as business and government departments, for example, the Department for Education and Employment and the Home Office. Network members include schools, colleges, universities, education business partnerships, careers services, businesses, voluntary and community groups and mentoring practitioners amongst others. The NMN has a membership of over 900 organisations (February 2001 figures).

[www.nmn.org.uk](http://www.nmn.org.uk)

### **Quality and Performance Improvement, Dissemination Unit (QPID)**

For QPID national studies, see:

[www.dfes.gov.uk/studynet](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/studynet)

### **TUC Learning Service**

TUC Learning Services projects promote joint action on training between unions and employers, based on partnerships in the regions.

[www.tuc.org.uk/learning](http://www.tuc.org.uk/learning)

### **The Union Learning Fund**

The Union Learning Fund (ULF) promotes activity by unions in support of the government's objective of creating a learning society, by influencing the increase in take up of learning in the workplace and boosting unions' capacity as learning organisations. Union Learning Fund projects range from basic skills to continuing professional development. Funds are used to open workplace learning centres, train learner representatives, run courses and help people find learning opportunities to suit them.

[www.dfes.gov.uk/ulf](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/ulf)

### **YMCA England**

[www.ymca.org.uk](http://www.ymca.org.uk)

## APPENDIX 1

# Case study leaders and sites

## Nacro

Shirley Courtney-Sinclair  
Training Manager  
Nacro Darlington

Sue Gillies  
Programme Development Manager (National)  
Nacro Peterborough

Brian Kynaston  
Divisional Manager  
Nacro Black Country and Shropshire  
Nacro Sandwell

Pat Moss  
Staff Development Manager (National)

Barbara Wilson  
Training Manager  
Nacro Slough

## YMCA

Dawn Brannigan  
Manager  
YMCA Training, Irlam, Manchester

Judith Carruthers  
Manager  
YMCA Training, Leeds

Joyce Chrisanthou  
Training Adviser  
YMCA Training, South Croydon

Julie Mills  
Manager  
YMCA Training, Stowmarket, Suffolk

## APPENDIX 2

# Developing good practice: key actions

### Getting employers involved

- Adopt a strategic approach to employer involvement: make sure that steps to involve employers are recognised as an important element in the training provider's business plan and culture.
- Keep in touch routinely with employers, whether or not there is a specific work-based learning opportunity in prospect.
- Develop a sensitive, intuitive and flexible style in responding to the different needs of employers and their varying capacity to be involved – whether as occasional or regular advisers, providers of work-based learning, etc.
- Develop a special training focus or 'niche' that will help employers to identify with the training provider. This may be a specific occupational or business focus, or an emphasis on benefit to the community.
- Offer services of direct benefit to the employer, such as advice on health and safety legislation.
- Maintain and use good records of employer contacts that are shared within the organisation.
- Make sure that commitments to employers are followed up, for example, by matching learners to suitable on-the-job learning opportunities as quickly as possible.
- Involve employers in monitoring/evaluating learning programmes and making a strategic input to planning the content of programmes.
- Seek to widen the base of employer support by using existing employer contacts and by networking with other agencies.
- Do not give up when contacts fail to produce results: be persistent and try other avenues.

### Resources to do the job

- Help staff acquire the skills and attributes needed to be successful in engaging employers and working with them. Look for these skills and attributes in new recruits.
- Maintain staffing at levels that allow a proper balance between centre-based learning, on-the-job learner support (by the training provider), and activities to engage and support employers.
- Put in place good staff development, training and mentoring.
- Prepare, maintain and use good quality documentation to support joint work with employers.
- Provide opportunities and facilities for trainers to share information and experience relating to employer links and to use these to benefit learners.
- Ensure that training centre premises and facilities inspire learners' and employers' confidence.
- Ensure right at the start that employers are aware of and able to offer the amount of staff time needed for effective supervision and support on the job.
- Provide good on-the-job opportunities and facilities for learners to learn from their workplace experience.

### **Preparing for learning at work**

- Help employers to understand the learners' courses and qualification requirements.
- Match learners to employers and prepare thoroughly on both sides, through initial assessment.
- Offer work tasters, trial periods, pre-placement training and good induction.
- Prepare an individual learning plan for each learner, at the start.
- Prepare clear, simple information for employers.
- As trainers, keep up to date with industry requirements.
- Give authoritative advice on the legislative requirements covering learners, such as health and safety and equal opportunities.

### **Supporting effective learning in the workplace**

- Synchronise on- and off-the-job learning, so that learners readily appreciate the relevance of theory to practical applications.
- Identify real and challenging opportunities for learning and problem solving on the job.
- Give the learner time on the job to maintain a 'learning log'. This should include practical examples of tasks undertaken, to demonstrate the progress the learner has made.
- Enable learners to reflect on the tasks they undertake in the workplace and the problems they encounter, in such a way that they build up their knowledge base and draw on it when needed. The learning log should assist this process.
- Enlist the active involvement of supervisors, mentors and peers (where appropriate) in the learning process.
- Where possible, involve trade union learning representatives in providing additional learning support. Union learning representatives often receive front-line advice and guidance training through the services of the TUC.
- Involve employers in reviewing learners' progress and achievement and planning the next steps.
- Respond to employers' needs and concerns, identified through effective feedback. This includes providing 'added value' training elements to meet employers' specific needs.
- If a placement runs into serious difficulty and breaks down, ensure that a full and timely response is made and that managers are involved.

### **Supporting learners' personal development**

- From the start, make employers aware (wherever possible, without infringing confidentiality) of any problems that are likely to affect learners' performance in the workplace.
- Provide support for key skills development, based on an initial assessment of the learner's key skill requirements.
- Ensure that learners are able to secure expert professional advice and support in the case of significant difficulties.

### APPENDIX 3

## Employers involved in the study

Sandra Allen, Nursing Home Proprietor, Newton House, Claydon, Suffolk

Bentley Computers, Stowmarket

Dave Chadwick, Head of Training, Furniture Resource Centre

Allan L Earl, Managing Director, Saddington Builder, Darlington

Hopgoods Factory Outlet, Stowmarket

Sandra Hutchinson, Owner of Primley Park Day Nurseries, Leeds

David Ingham, Manager, Fossett and Thorn, Peterborough

Tony Lamont, Sunrise Bakeries, West Midlands

Alf Landers, Managing Director, Churchbridge Autos, Oldbury

Helen McArthy, YMCA Creche

Dave Prescott, Manager, Hi Q, Peterborough

Sue Salmon, Mowlam

Philip Wenham, Moorfield Primary School, Manchester

Shirley Woolley, Chairman, BOLDU Ltd

### APPENDIX 4

## External Advisory Group

Bill Adshead, Head of Training, Learning and Skills Council, West of England

Maureen Adsley, Contract Manager, WESTEC

Adrian Anderson, Policy & Development Director, NTO National Council

Simon Baddeley, Head of Promoting Quality Unit, DfEE

Diana Beardsell, National Training Systems Manager, YMCA Training

Greg Cejer, Education Policy Manager, FEFC

Dave Chadwick, Head of Training, Furniture Resource Centre

Dave Eva, Project Coordinator, NWTUC Bargaining for Skills Unit

Craig Harris, Director of Education and Employment, Nacro

Chris Higgs, Team Leader – Quality, H&S, Employment Service

Anne Linsey, Managing Director, YMCA Training

Christa McGrath, Head of Quality and Development, Nacro

Sylvia Merris-McDonald, Communications & Research,  
Association of Learning Providers

Tim J Smith, Inspector, Training Standards Council

Rose Turner, Business Development Manager, Hammersmith and West London College

Andy Westwood, Director of Development, Employment Policy Institute

Shirley Woolley, Chairman, BOLDU Ltd

**Drawing on case studies of practice by Nacro and YMCA Training, these guidelines are designed to help training providers and employers assess and improve the quality and effectiveness of employer involvement in work-based learning. Five aspects of practice are covered, from getting employers involved, through to supporting learners' personal development. The guidelines include examples of practice and ideas for action by training providers and employers. They can be used by individuals, staff teams, or by local groups. Though they are designed particularly for government-funded, work-based learning programmes, the guidelines are relevant to all training providers and employers engaged in learning in the workplace.**