

## Bulletin number 24

# Review of Workplace Core Skills: Delivery and Assessment

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# 1 Introduction

The current suite of Workplace-assessed Core Skills Units were introduced by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) in January 2001 and designed for use with Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs), within Modern Apprenticeships (MA), or more generally in the workplace.

There are a total of 20 Workplace Core Skills Units covering each of the five Core Skills:

- ◆ Communication
- ◆ Numeracy
- ◆ Information Technology (IT)
- ◆ Problem Solving
- ◆ Working with Others

at each of the following levels:

- ◆ Higher
- ◆ Intermediate 2
- ◆ Intermediate 1
- ◆ Access 3

Six awarding bodies or awarding body partnerships are accredited to offer Workplace-assessed Core Skills Units, although not all awarding bodies or partnerships are accredited to offer all the Units.

The SQA commissioned the Institute of Education, University of Stirling to undertake this research project with the following aims:

- ◆ An investigation into the delivery of Workplace-assessed Core Skills across all awarding bodies.
- ◆ An evaluation of the impact and relevance of the Workplace-assessed Core Skills Pack and Guidance, in particular its impact on assessment and the consistency of assessment across awarding bodies and sectors.
- ◆ An investigation into the recognition given to Core Skills obtained through previous SQA qualification achievement and Workplace Core Skills.
- ◆ Identification of good practice in delivery and assessment of Workplace Core Skills which could be developed into exemplars and areas of practice which require further investigation.

## **Methodology**

The research methodology included a literature review, case studies, focus groups, analysis of secondary data and incidence of Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL).

## 2 Findings

### **Investigation into the delivery of Workplace-assessed Core Skills across all awarding bodies**

The majority of providers are using Individual Learning Plans and offering some degree of individual guidance and support to candidates.

There is little evidence of progression taking place within the Workplace Core Skill levels. Those providers who offered progression from Intermediate 1 to Intermediate 2 awards generally used diagnostic assessment tools that placed the candidates on the appropriate level of Workplace Core Skills. This practice should be more widely encouraged across the Workplace Core Skills providers.

Workplace Core Skills were more effectively delivered by tutors when a specified number of hours were allocated to teaching the required skills. There was evidence to suggest that instructors often conflated teaching with assessment.

The most effective way to deliver Workplace Core Skills was to make them context-specific to the occupation and thus directly relevant to the candidates. There was lots of existing good practice from providers on doing this.

### **Evaluation of the impact and relevance of the Workplace-assessed Core Skills Pack and Guidance, in particular its impact on assessment and the consistency of assessment across awarding bodies and sectors**

The awarding body packs for assessing Workplace Core Skills are extensively used by providers. Generally speaking, the packs are seen as a ‘good start’ — and are adapted by users to meet local circumstances. This flexibility in the use of the packs should be encouraged.

### **Investigation into the recognition given to Core Skills obtained through previous achievement of SQA qualifications and Workplace Core Skills**

Based on the centre visits sample, where the Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) occurred, it mainly takes the form of the Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL). APCL was found to mainly be achieved through the use of SQA’s online ‘Navigator’ facility (over 50% of respondents) and the use of the candidates’ Scottish Qualifications Certificate (39% of respondents).

Interestingly, the perception of respondents was that candidates’ Core Skills profiles were achieved through discrete ‘taught’ Units and not, as in many cases, achieved through the skills being embedded in National Qualifications.

Evidence from the SQA candidate database desk research suggests that APCL occurred in 75% of the cases in the sample. However, there was evidence of APCL not taking place in nine out of ten centres.

### **Identification of good practice in delivery and assessment of Workplace Core Skills that could be developed into exemplars and areas of practice which require further investigation**

There was limited evidence of ‘best practice’ in the design and delivery of the Workplace Core Skills curriculum. In fact, there was no shared notion of what a curriculum for the five Core Skills would look like in terms of coverage and depth of study. Awarding bodies should consider offering guidelines on the design and delivery of Workplace Core Skills which are comparable with the guidelines issued on assessing Workplace Core Skills.

The ‘best practice’ providers tended to employ qualified instructors and teachers to design, deliver and assess Workplace Core Skills. This often meant staff had to have or be ‘working towards’ having a recognised teaching qualification and Core Skills award. It was not deemed sufficient by these centres for staff to have only an occupationally relevant qualification and/or Assessor award.

Finally, the ‘excellent’ centres in the sample of case studies tended to have a coherent ‘Continuous Professional Development’ programme for their staff that involved on-going training in pedagogic and assessment related issues linked specifically to Workplace Core Skills.

The ‘best practice’ examples of the teaching and assessment of Workplace Core Skills were found in organisations that offered discrete Workplace Core Skill Units that were linked to an ‘employability’ agenda eg Ready for Work.

For more mature candidates it is possible to accredit prior experiential learning from a range of work-based and social and life-skill domains. However, this would require additional training for vocational assessors to equip them with the appropriate Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) skills.

There was ample evidence of good practice in the assessment of Workplace Core Skills. The use of ‘naturally-occurring’ evidence should be encouraged, although this should not be left until the end of the Modern Apprenticeship or ‘bolted-on’ to the portfolio. External Verifiers need to support assessors in the use of continuous assessment practices for Workplace Core Skills that are based upon existing naturally-occurring evidence.

## **Analysis of Workplace Core Skills certifications**

Workplace Core Skills certifications across all the awarding bodies was 59,375 for the period 2001–2005. At the time of initial accreditation a forecast of 47,971 certifications was made for the first three years of accreditation.

Workplace Core Skills certifications are fairly evenly spread across all Units for the period 2001–2005, albeit, with a higher number of certifications for Working with Others.

Intermediate 1 (56.77%) is the most commonly certificated Workplace Core Skill level, followed by Access 3 (24.16%). There is little take-up at Higher level. This perhaps reflects the level of Workplace Core Skills demands within Modern Apprenticeship frameworks.

The SQA has awarded almost 75% of all Workplace Core Skills Units. Around 25% of Workplace Core Skills Unit certifications (across all awarding bodies) have been awarded to British Army candidates through SQA's Awards UK subsidiary.

With reference to the SQA and SQA/Hospitality Awarding Body awarding body/partnership datasets:

- ◆ Males comprised the highest number of certifications for Working with Others, Communication and Problem Solving.
- ◆ Females comprised the highest number of certifications for Information Technology and Numeracy.
- ◆ The average age of candidates (at registration) across all Units is 25 years of age, with an average age of 26 years for females and 23 years for males.
- ◆ Over 65% of the Workplace Core Skills certifications were for candidates under 25 years at the time of registration.

### 3 Recommendations

It is recommended that all awarding bodies be required to keep a standardised database on Workplace Core Skills that includes candidates' age, gender, Units, level of award and provider. This data should also have the candidate's start date and completion date to allow for an analysis of completion rates.

The current accreditation of prior certificated learning (APCL) should be encouraged and extended to all training providers. The use of the accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) across different work and social domains needs to be developed. The use of diagnostic electronic tools by SQA is a welcome development in this field.

The awarding bodies should develop and disseminate curriculum resource materials on Workplace Core Skills that are based upon a breadth and depth of study within particular occupations. This would include context-dependent examples of Workplace Core Skills.

It is recommended that a minimum number of teaching hours should be set for each of the Workplace Core Skills. This would include an element of continuous assessment, but would primarily be used to give breadth and depth to the Workplace Core Skill curriculum.

External verifiers should encourage the collection of 'naturally-occurring evidence' on a continuous assessment basis over the period of the Modern Apprenticeship.

The awarding bodies should consider introducing a Workplace Core Skill Award for vocational instructors/assessors that would include basic skills training, APL practices and assessment processes. This would be a requirement for those teaching and assessing Workplace Core Skills.

External funding bodies (eg local enterprise councils, Scottish Funding Council) need to re-consider the funding formulae for Workplace Core Skills. This should include a significant teaching component element to the award. Unless Workplace Core Skills are adequately funded they will remain purely a certification process of existing skill levels.

The regulatory quality framework for training providers of Workplace Core Skills varies according to the funding mechanism and the agency. This works against a consistency of standards in the area. It is recommended the HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) should have a remit across all training providers of Workplace Core Skills.

## 4 Aims and Methodology

### Aims of the research

The overall aim of the research was to investigate the delivery and assessment of Workplace Core Skills for all approved awarding bodies in Scotland, and in particular to:

- ◆ evaluate the impact and relevance of the Workplace Core Skills Pack and Guidance, its impact on assessment and the consistency of assessment across awarding bodies and sectors
- ◆ investigate the recognition given to Core Skills through previous certification processes
- ◆ identify good practice in the delivery and assessment of Workplace Core Skills

### Research design and methods

The study included both quantitative and qualitative research methods and was structured into three distinct phases:

- ◆ consolidation of existing literature on the delivery and assessment of Core Skills
- ◆ collection and analysis of quantitative data supplied by the awarding bodies
- ◆ cross-sectional case studies

Existing literature was reviewed and summarised to identify current practice in the delivery and assessment of generic transferable skills. This included SQA research, University of Stirling discussion papers, and Scottish Further Education Unit (SFEU) research projects. Current research papers on ‘Key Skills’ from England were also included in the search.

An analysis of quantitative data was undertaken through existing SQA statistical sources on the certifications of Workplace Core Skill awards by awarding body, age and gender of candidates, type of training centre and type and level of award. This secondary data was analysed by the Institute of Education. The data also proved invaluable in informing the design of the case studies.

A ‘purposeful’ sample of relevant case study centres was selected. This included ‘best practice’ examples developed from centres that are effectively delivering and assessing Workplace Core Skills. Table 1 describes the framework used to structure the sample. The population was in the order of 100 centres; therefore, a 20% sample was taken, this reflected a range of the characteristics of the centres in question.

**Table 1: Sampling characteristics of the case study centres**

<b>Awarding bodies</b>	<b>Centres</b>	<b>Geographical</b>	<b>Size</b>
6	Colleges	Urban	Large
	Private Trainers	Rural	Medium
	Employers	Mixed	Small
	Army		

Particular priority was given to the delivery and assessment of Workplace Core Skills by the six awarding bodies and awarding body Partnership in Scotland. Other characteristics include centre type, geographical location and size of organisation. Within the sample of 20 organisations a range of data collection methods were used with different respondents. This is shown in Table 2 below. Given the design of the study, it is particularly important that that centre managers, trainers and assessors and, to a lesser extent, candidates were interviewed. The case study interviews involved at least two key informants from each centre. This gave a minimum of 25 interviewees as part of the study. In addition, evidence was collected from a range of candidates based upon two focus groups.

**Table 2: Sampling matrix — how data was collected, by type of respondent**

<b>Quantitative data</b>	<b>Documentary Evidence</b>	<b>Interviews</b>	<b>Focus Groups</b>
Awarding Body	Centre Type	Centre Manager	Current Candidates
Centre Type	Trainer/ Assessor	Instructor/ Assessor	Past Candidates
Candidates	Candidates		

The interview schedule (Appendix 2) and focus group framework (Appendix 3) were designed in consultation with SQA and those involved in the pilot studies. However, a key feature of this stage of the research was to bring together not only the perceptions of those delivering and assessing Workplace Core Skills but also documentary evidence of their actual practices in the workplace. This involved discussion of the *'Guide to delivering and assessing Workplace Core Skills'* (SQA, 2001) and the accreditation of prior certification and learning. The above information was incorporated into two surveys to allow for the analysis of the data through descriptive statistics. This was then supplemented by more in-depth analysis using the 'voices' of the key informants and documentary evidence.

## **Confidentiality**

It was agreed with the interviewees that the centres and respondents would not be identified within the research report. Although a list of centres participating in the research is provided no data from particular centres is identified. All those contributing to the interviews volunteered to take part in the research.

# 5 Literature Review

## Introduction

This literature review forms part of a commissioned study by SQA into the delivery and assessment of Workplace Core Skills. Workplace Core Skill Units were introduced in January 2001 and form an integral part of the delivery of Modern Apprenticeships, SVQs and other job-related training. The review will focus on particular aspects of Workplace Core Skills including their design and assessment, prior accreditation, and the use of guidance and information packs.

The literature review involved a systematic search of the three main English Language databases:

- ◆ ERIC (Educational Resources Information Centre in the USA)
- ◆ BEI (British Educational Index in the UK)
- ◆ BIDS (International Bibliography of the Social Sciences)

by using the following key word search combinations:

- ◆ ‘Core Skills’<sup>1</sup>
- ◆ ‘Key Skills’
- ◆ ‘Teaching and Learning’
- ◆ ‘Assessment’
- ◆ ‘Further Education in Scotland’.

The search covers the period 1995–2005. The HMIE inspection reports of Further Education colleges have also been examined for specific references made to Core Skills. The websites of SQA and Scottish Further Education Unit have been accessed to identify current research in the delivery of Core Skills. Although not a major focus of the study, comparative literature on ‘Key Skills’ in England and Wales has been included within the review. It should be noted at the outset that the literature often refers to ‘Core’ and ‘Key’ Skills as interchangeable concepts, reflecting a common UK heritage to the debate on foundation skills (Welsh and Canning, 2002).

## Defining Core Skills

The literature on Core/Key Skills suggests that it is a socially constructed concept (Canning, 2005a). Over the years, the meaning of generic skills has continually changed, reflecting social, political and economic trends.

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<sup>1</sup> Core Skills are defined by SQA. Key Skills are defined by QCA and generic transferable skills are used to cover both Core Skills and Key Skills.

For instance, in the 1980s language education was central to any discourse on core skills, while in the 1990s enterprise education became much more prominent. Both have subsequently been eclipsed by the softer skills of teamwork and improving own learning. Indeed, in many ways the ‘concept of skill has become bigger, broader and much fuzzier around the edges’ (Warhurst et al, 2004). Definitions of generic transferable skills are, therefore, contested, and the concept has increasingly become imbued with notions of ‘emotive and aesthetic labour’. In turn, it has become tangled up with attributes and dispositions.

However, for the purpose of this research, Core Skills will be taken to mean the clusters of foundation generic skills identified by the SQA. These are:

- ◆ Communication
- ◆ Working with Others
- ◆ Numeracy
- ◆ Problem Solving
- ◆ Using Information Technology

They are offered at five levels and can be certificated as stand-alone Units, although typically they are ‘signposted’ or ‘embedded’ within National Qualifications. More recently ‘enterprise’ has been discussed as a potential new Core Skill in the literature (SQA, 2005). Indeed, HMIE indicate that the extent of development of enterprise in the sector has not been fully explored given its potential emergence as a Core Skill (HMIE, 2001).

The literature identifies three distinct methods for evidencing Core Skills; as discrete Units, as ‘signposted’ processes that are explicitly integrated within existing texts, and as ‘embedded’ texts that are ‘automatically’ certificated (Canning, 2005b). The Workplace Core Skills Units are primarily discrete Units whilst those ‘embedded’ within existing National Qualifications within schools can be automatically certificated. There are also ‘signposted’ Core Skills within accredited programmes in colleges, for example in Skills for Work courses. The Workplace Core Skills can be assessed at different levels of attainment:

- ◆ Access 3
- ◆ Intermediate 1
- ◆ Intermediate 2
- ◆ Higher

This enables candidates to ‘gain certification in any Core Skill at any of these levels’. They are designed therefore to be flexible and learner-centred to cater for a range of abilities. Workplace Core Skills Assessment Packs have also been produced for each of the Core Skill Units to assist candidates in gathering appropriate work-based evidence.

## Contextualisation of Core Skills

The ‘embedded’ approach is favoured in Scotland (Canning, 2005a) but is gradually losing support as it is claimed that it does not adequately address the needs of a range of individuals (HMIE, 2001). Indeed, there are potential problems with the ‘embedded’ approach as the particular Core Skills may remain ‘hidden’ or ‘invisible’ to both the student and the employer (Wallace, 2005).

However, there is evidence to suggest that learners, teachers and parents are resistant to ‘stand-alone’ Key Skills assessments as they are seen as time consuming and unnecessary and can, in certain circumstances, lead to pupil disaffection (Hayward and Fernandez, 2004). The potential danger here is that generic transferable skills may be associated with a ‘deficit model’ of learning.

Green (1998) argues that in comparison with the UK, other European countries spend twice as much classroom time with students on foundation skills. This broader vocational education is normally undertaken within a much more clearly defined taught curriculum.

## Teaching and learning of Key Skills

Research undertaken by Unwin et al (2000) and QPID (2000) provides some of the more interesting data on the teaching and learning of Key Skills in schools, colleges and the workplace. The former covers both academic and vocational curriculum while the latter focuses on the delivery of Key Skills within the Modern Apprenticeship programme.

Unwin et al (2000) highlight the different approaches in the design and teaching of Key Skills based upon the notions of ‘integration’ and ‘separateness’. Their study claims that IT and Numeracy are often taught as separate subjects while Communications is integrated within the broader curricula. In contrast, the QPID study found that IT was the only Key Skill taught separately but also confirmed that the Application of Numbers and IT often caused the most difficulty for teachers.

The QPID study identified different approaches to the design and teaching of Key Skills based upon occupational areas. More traditional apprenticeship occupations tended to provide a ‘curriculum driven’ model of teaching Key Skills that integrated both ‘on and off the job’ training, while the newer service-based occupations tended to rely more heavily upon an ‘assessment driven’ curriculum model. The sectors also had very different gender profiles.

Both studies found that employers, teachers and students preferred Key Skills to be integrated within a broader vocational curriculum. However, concerns were raised about the ability of non-specialist staff to deliver an integrated model of Key Skills provision. This was particularly the case when teaching the Key Skills of Working with Numbers and IT.

## **Assessment of Core and Key Skills**

Given the competence-based nature of Key Skills, there is a danger that assessment will drive the curriculum rather than the development of skills. This was a concern raised in the literature particularly when Key Skills formed part of a broader work-based programme such as Modern Apprenticeships (MA) or N/SVQs. Unwin et al (2000) found that assessment practices were most effective when ‘natural occurring’ evidence was used within a portfolio-based approach to teaching. However, this often resulted in a time consuming ‘one-to-one’ assessment relationship that required the assessor to both interpret and cross-reference much of the evidence used to support the assessment of the Key Skill.

Students and employers were supportive of the work-based nature of much of the Key Skills assessment methodology. However, employers were concerned about the over-bureaucratic processes involved in the verification processes and students disliked the use of computer-based diagnostic tools. These tools were often associated with a ‘deficit’ model of learning.

The literature suggests that separate Key Skill assessment within MAs and N/SVQs may lead to lower overall completion rates (Unwin, 2004). However, it could be argued that these work-based programmes already suffered from lower student completion rates in comparison with more traditional academic qualifications before the introduction of Core Skills (Canning, 1998 and Canning and Lang, 2004).

A range of studies indicate that students undertaking Core/Key Skills are of ‘mixed ability’ with a substantial number having difficulty with basic literacy and numeracy skills. This, it is suggested, leads to problems of motivation and retention on programmes and can result in student disaffection with the formal teaching of Core Skills as a series of separate subjects.

## **Accreditation of Prior Learning**

There is little evidence in the literature of any sustained attempts at accrediting prior learning as part of the induction phase of assessing Key Skills (Unwin et al, 2000). There would also seem to be reluctance by staff to assess the prior learning of Key Skills from other ‘domains’ besides the workplace. This rather interestingly stands in sharp contrast with community education and literacy tutors’ practices where the broader family and social activities are considered important sources of information on skill acquisition.

## Support and Guidance

Recent research has suggested a need to strengthen guidance procedures when advising and supporting students undertaking Core Skill programmes. In general terms, responses to student needs have been 'reactive' rather than 'proactive' (HMIE, 2001). In fact, there is little evidence in the literature of any strategic approach to planning student support and guidance systems for Core Skills within institutions.

In contrast with England, there is evidence in Scotland of a plethora of teaching and assessment materials being produced to support the delivery of Core Skills. These range from awarding body assessment packs to online diagnostic assessments and sector-based teaching materials.

## The Demand for Core Skills

The discourse on Core Skills places employers in a central role in shaping the skills for work curriculum. Employer groups have consistently supported the Core Skills agenda in national policy debates (CBI Scotland, 2000). However, this apparent enthusiasm for transferable skills appears to dissipate somewhat when individual employer practices are considered at a local level. Recent research in Scotland (SQA, 2002) suggests that the majority of employers have little awareness, or, indeed, understanding of the SQA's Core Skills profile. Although the 'softer' Core Skills were valued, these were linked more to the disposition and attitudes of the candidates rather than to any acquired set of Core Skills.

An interesting question here is who exactly is responsible for developing Core Skills? The answer to the question is both a conceptual and an empirical one. If Core/Key Skills are conceptualised as generic 'soft skills' (non-cognitive), for example, problem solving, then it would be reasonable to assume that an early intervention programme with pre-school children would help solve the problem (Heckman and Masterov, 2004). However, it could be argued that this is a rather over-deterministic approach and that schools and colleges could play an important role in developing generic Core Skills. If, however, Core Skills are conceptualised as context-bound and collectively formed, then employers would play a central role in developing them within a workplace environment. Indeed, one of the few empirical studies into the acquisition of Key skills (Green et al, 2001) suggests that 'soft skills' are better learned on-the-job, while schools, colleges and universities would do better concentrating on academic and technical skills. Green (2005) also confirms the evidence from other studies that low level generic skills 'are not associated with a high positive premium in the labour market'.

## **Best practice in the delivery of Core/Key Skills**

Bringing together the key studies from the literature (Unwin et al, 2000, QPID, 2000 and HMIE, 2001) it is possible to identify ‘best practice’ in the delivery of generic transferable skills.

According to HMIE it is important to have an initial screening assessment of candidates and to formulate a Core Skills profile and Individual Action Plan. This would subsequently lead to progress monitoring and guidance. In addition, a staff development plan would be necessary to ensure consistency of support and guidance for students.

QPID (2000) recommended the development of Key Skills training materials, the integration of Key Skills delivery with occupational training, an improvement in staff training, better assessment of prior achievement and avoiding the separate assessment of Key Skills.

Unwin et al (2000) highlight the need to integrate Key Skills within daily work routines, better staff development, the need for specialist staff to teach Numeracy and IT, Individual Learning Plans and the development of support materials.

## **Themes emerging from the literature review**

The concept of generic transferable skills is socially constructed and can be conceptualised in many different ways.

There is a continuing debate on how to design and deliver generic transferable skills. This normally comes down to whether the skills should be taught in an ‘integrated’ or ‘separate’ manner. This, in turn, leads to a wide range of practices in the teaching of generic transferable skills.

Generic transferable skill candidates are likely to be of mixed ability, require additional support and guidance and be de-motivated by ‘school-based teaching methods’.

It is important to have initial screening, guidance and diagnostic assessment of generic transferable skills and for this to be included in Individual Learning Plans for students.

It is important to have a well planned Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL) process and to encourage the use of experiential learning from across different domains (eg work, home and social) when assessing generic transferable skills.

There is a need to integrate generic transferable skills with daily work routines and to ensure that staff are adequately trained to undertake the design, delivery and assessment of these skills within a continuous developmental model. In certain generic transferable skills subjects this would include the use of specialist teaching tutors.

There is evidence to suggest that properly designed generic transferable skills learning materials are required to support centres in the delivery and assessment of Workplace Core Skills.

# 6 Analysis of Workplace Core Skills Certifications

## Methodology

Three sets of data were collected:

- 1 At the commencement of the project all awarding bodies and awarding body partnerships were asked to provide details of all their current Workplace Core Skills centres and the number of current candidates at each centre. This information was used primarily to select the centre sample for case study visits.
- 2 During the project, all Workplace Core Skills awarding bodies were invited to provide full certification data for all the Units they were accredited to offer as part of their accreditation period extension request. This information has been employed in Section One of this appendix to allow an analysis of the full Workplace Core Skills market to date, albeit with a limited set of variables.
- 3 Not all awarding bodies employ the same process for registering or recording Workplace Core Skills candidate information. As a result the level of analysis possible is variable. For this reason full candidate records for all SQA and SQA/Hospitality Awarding Body Workplace Core Skills certifications were extracted into a spreadsheet format to allow more in-depth analysis of a greater number of variables across a large historical dataset. This is presented in 6.2.

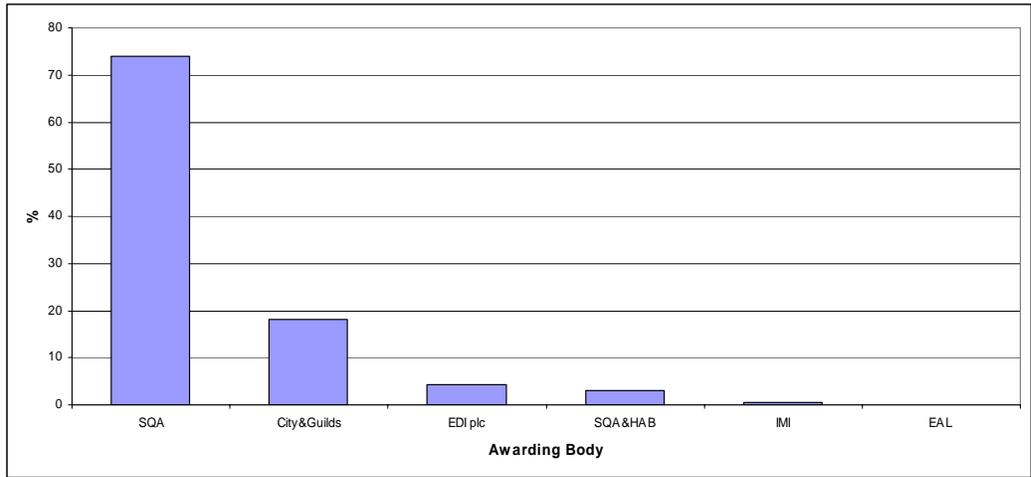
## 6.1 Overall Workplace Core Skills market

A total of 59,375 Workplace Core Skills Unit certifications have been made across all awarding bodies accredited to offer the Units between their initial accreditation in 2001 and December 2005.

### Awarding bodies

The majority of Unit certifications, just under 74%, have been made by SQA. City and Guilds is the next largest awarding body accounting for 18.06% of certifications. The remaining three awarding bodies and awarding body partnerships account for less than 10% of certifications with EMTA Awards Ltd indicating that they have neither entered nor certificated a candidate for the Units. However, it should be noted that not all awarding bodies or awarding body partnerships are accredited to offer the full range of Units.

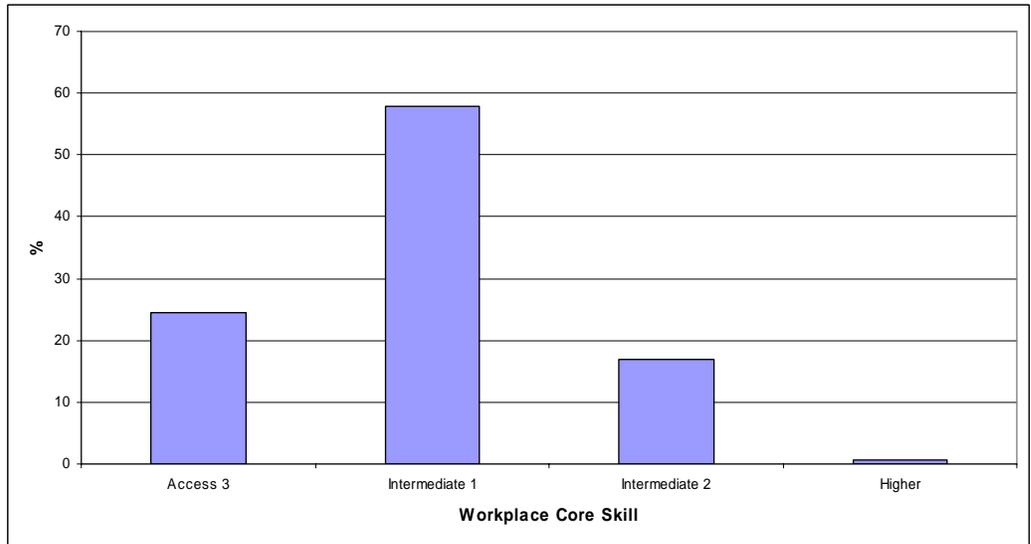
**Table 3: Certifications Across All awarding bodies from Accreditation to December 2005 (n=59,375)**



### Level

Intermediate 1 is the most commonly certificated Workplace Core Skill level with 56.77% of the total certifications followed by Access 3 (24.16%) perhaps reflecting the demands of Modern Apprenticeship frameworks. There has been a very low level of Higher certifications.

**Table 4: WPCS Certifications by Level Across All awarding bodies (n=59,375)**

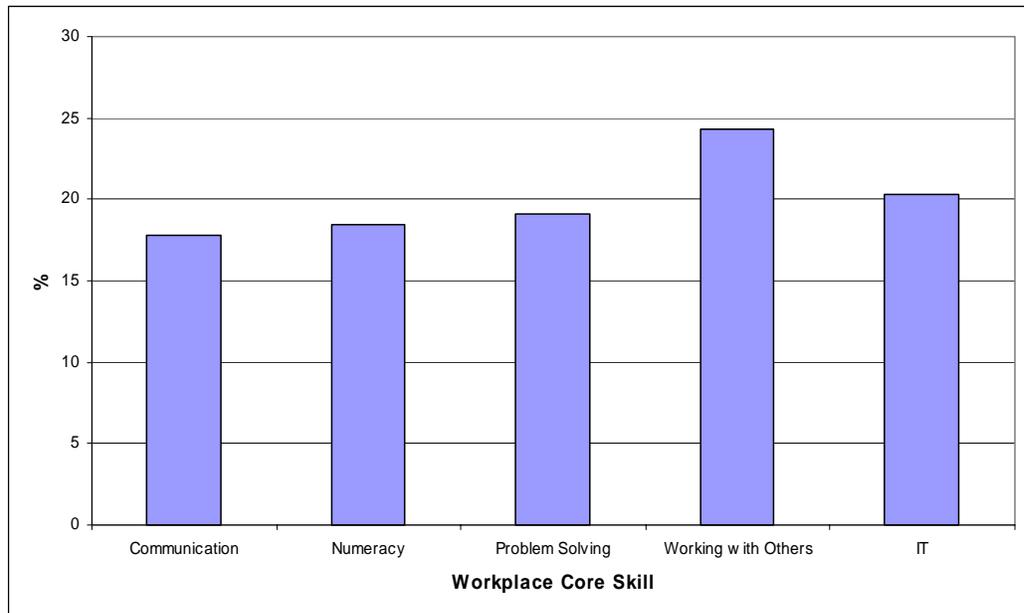


### Core Skill

Overall, there was a relatively equitable distribution of certifications across the five Workplace Core Skills with the exception of Working

with Others which accounted for a greater proportion (24.36%) of all certifications over the period.

**Table 5: WPCS Certifications by Level Across All awarding bodies (n=59,375)**



## 6.2 SQA and SQA/Hospitality Awarding Body certifications

A sample of Workplace Core Skills certifications was taken from SQA's Awards Processing System (APS) database on 27 September 2005. The sample included all Workplace Core Skills Unit certifications from initial accreditation until the above date for both the SQA and SQA/Hospitality Awarding Body.

The sample included 42,759 candidates accounting for around 70% of all Workplace Core Skills Unit certifications across all awarding bodies between initial accreditation and December 2005.

Whilst the sample may not be representative of all awarding bodies it does provide the opportunity to carry out a more detailed investigation across a large dataset of Workplace Core Skills certifications based on the following variables:

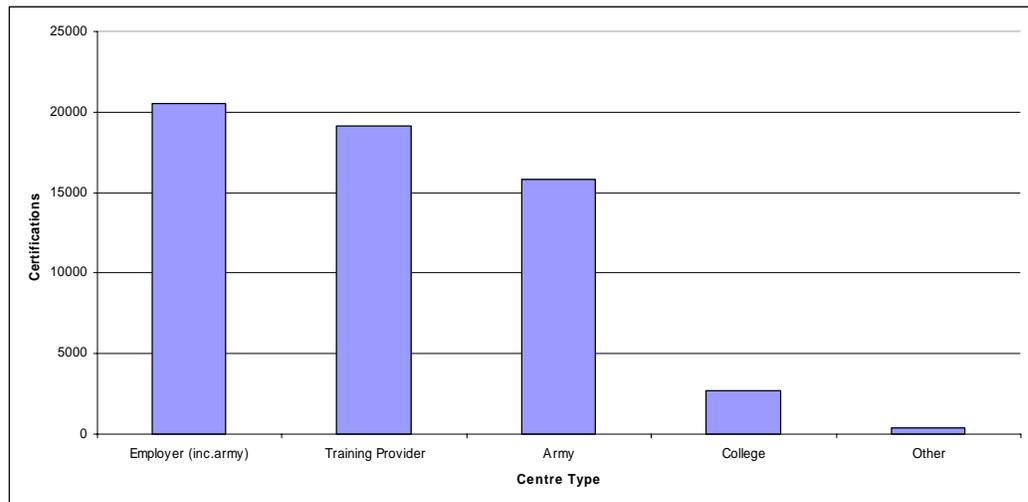
- ◆ level
- ◆ Core Skill
- ◆ gender
- ◆ age profile
- ◆ centre type
- ◆ annual distribution

### Centre type

Employers (including the army) are the largest single centre type and accounting for over 20,000 Workplace Core Skills certifications. However, the Employer centre type is mainly composed of over 15,000 British Army Workplace Core Skills certifications. In fact, the British army actually accounts for just over a quarter of all Workplace Core Skills certifications across all awarding bodies from initial accreditation to December 2005.

Were the British army certifications to be removed from the Employer centre type, Training Providers would be the largest centre type in the sample with 19,168 Unit certifications or 44.83% of the certifications in the sample.

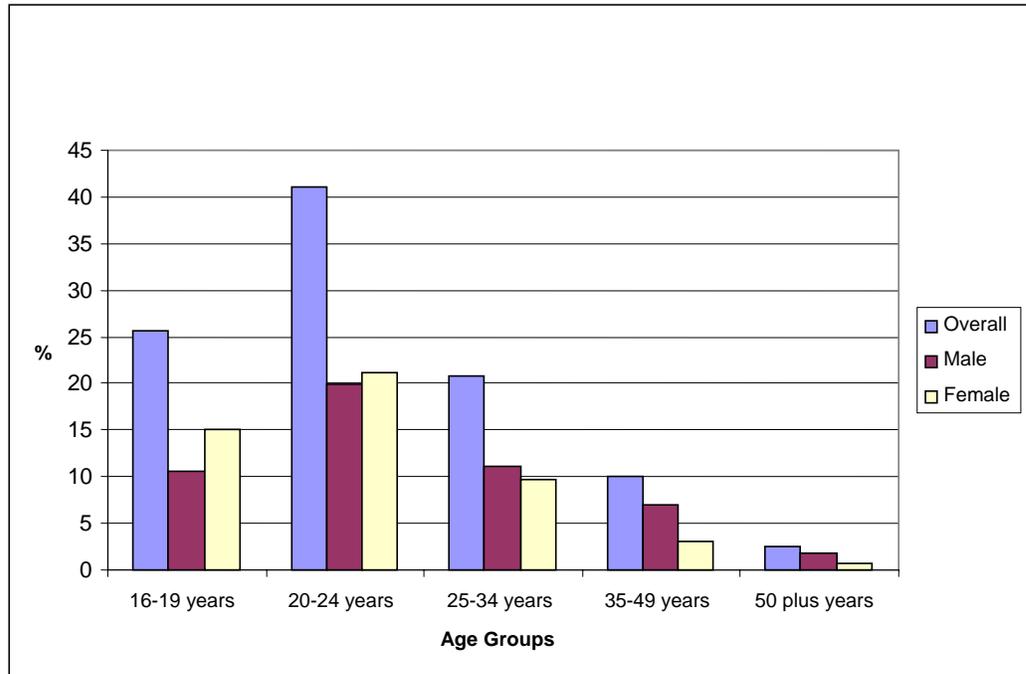
**Table 6: WPCS Certifications by Centre Type (n=42,759)**



### Age group and gender

The average age of candidates (at registration) across all Units is 25 years, with an average age of 26 years for females and 23 years for males. Over 40% of certifications in the sample were awarded to candidates in the 20–24 years age group with a relatively equal gender distribution. This gender distribution is similar 25–34 years age group. However, there is evidence of more female certifications in the 16–19 age group, but males are in the majority in the 35–49 years and 50 plus years groups, albeit with smaller age group sample sizes. Overall, 65% of certificates were awarded to candidates under the age of 25 years at the time of registration.

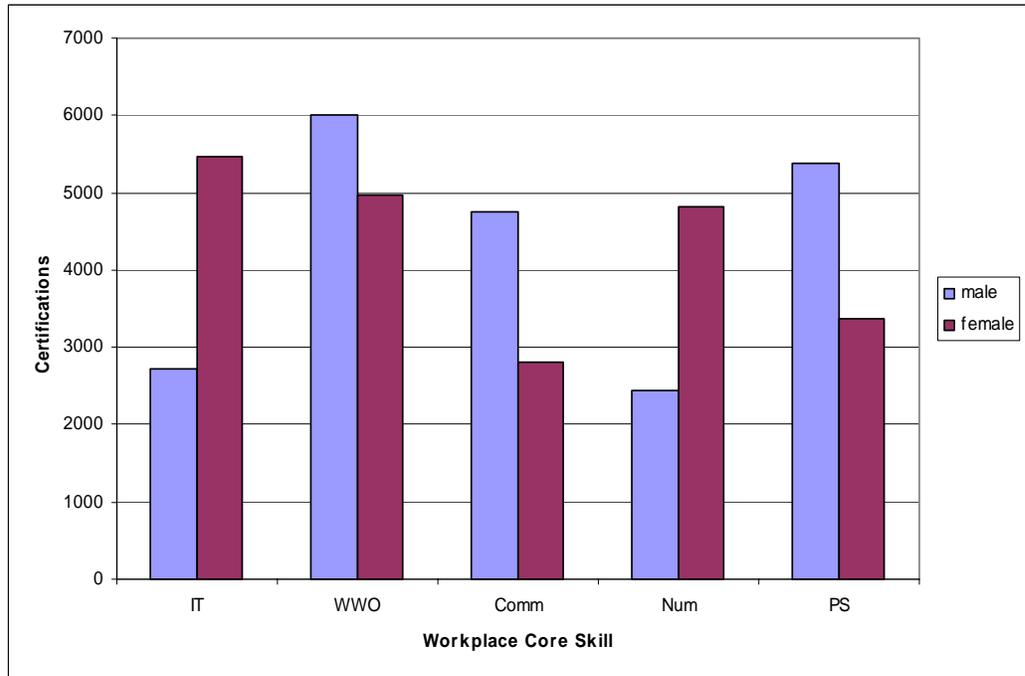
**Table 7: WPCS Certifications by Age Group and Gender (n=42,759)**



### **Core Skills and gender**

The gender distribution in terms of Workplace Core Skill certifications in the sample is almost equal. However, this hides a variance across the five Core Skills. The high uptake of predominantly male army candidates in Working with Others, Communication and Problem Solving may explain the high male representation in these Core Skills. However, both Numeracy and Information Technology Workplace Core Skills had more female certifications than male certifications.

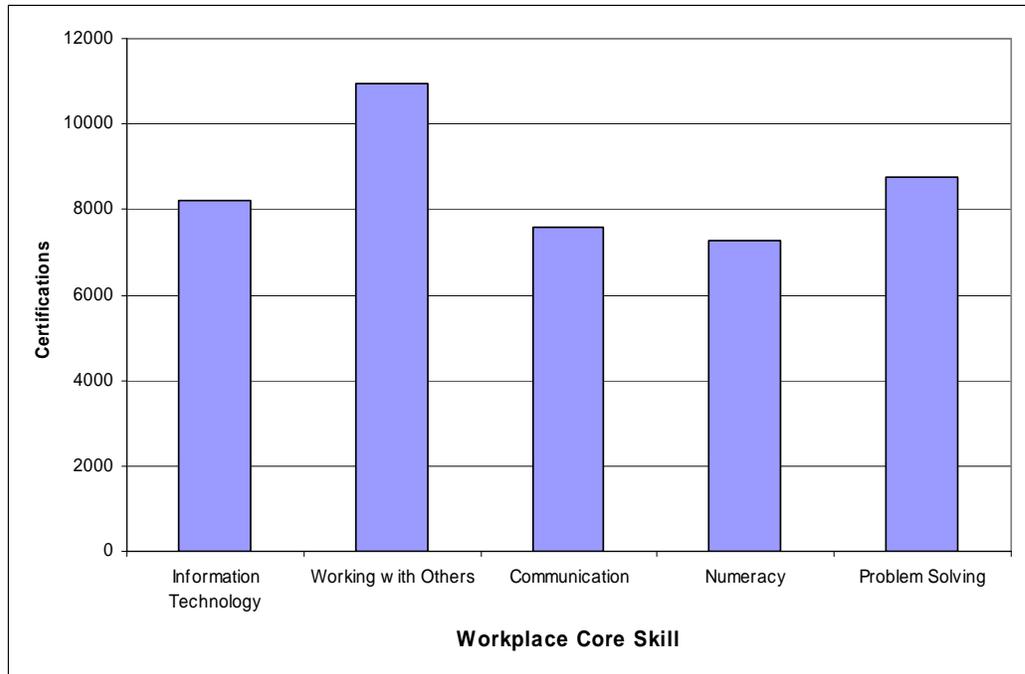
**Table 8: WPCS Certifications by Gender (n=42,759)**



### **Core Skill**

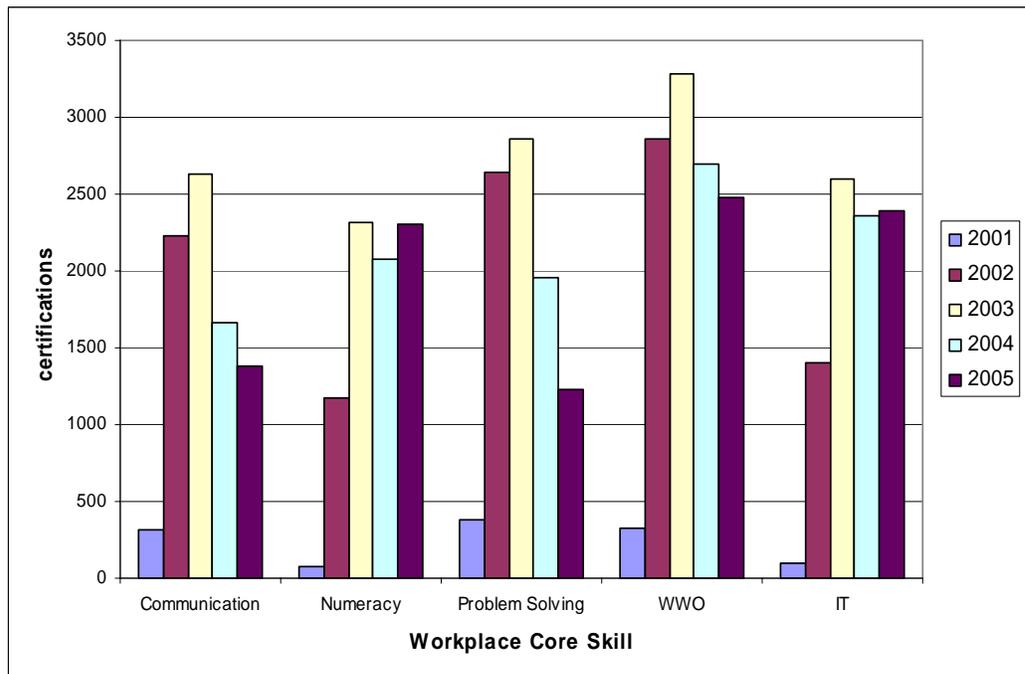
Reflecting the data across the whole Workplace Core Skill market, the distribution in the sample is relatively equal across the five Core Skills, albeit once again, with a higher number of Working With Others certifications.

**Table 9: WPCS Certification by Core Skill (n=42,759)**



### Certifications by year and Core Skill

Table 10: WPCS Certifications by Year and Core Skill (n=45,722)



All Workplace Core Skills experienced growth in certifications from initial accreditation in 2001 until 2003, followed by a fall in certifications in 2004. Full year certification data from 2005 has been included in Table 10 (above).

This illustrates that the trend consistency across all Workplace Core Skills certifications from 2001–2004 was broken in 2005 with Numeracy and Information Technology experiencing some growth in 2005, whilst the other Workplace Core Skills, especially Problem Solving experienced a decline.

# 7 Delivery and assessment of Workplace Core Skills

## Sample

There were 20 case study organisations and two pilot studies. The case studies involved undertaking 35 interviews with workplace vocational assessors, collecting teaching and assessment materials and undertaking focus groups with candidates. The organisations represented covered private training organisations, colleges, employers and the Army. The majority of the providers were private training providers.

Approximately 95% of the total respondents to the interviews (n=35) indicated that Workplace Core Skills formed part of their Modern Apprenticeship programmes. The only exceptions to this were the 'Get Ready for Work' programme, Life Skills courses within colleges and basic training within the army. Those linked to Modern Apprenticeships covered a wide range of apprenticeship 'frameworks' including Engineering, Hospitality, Health and Social Care, Customer Service, Business and Administration, Early Years Care and Education, Pharmacy Technicians, Dental Nursing, Management and Retail.

The Workplace Core Skills covered within the MAs tended to be at Access 3 and Intermediate 1 levels, depending on the particular apprenticeship framework and the particular Workplace Core Skill. In general terms, both the level of Workplace Core Skill and the way in which it was assessed were determined by the occupational framework. For instance, a number of apprenticeship frameworks required the Workplace Core Skills to be assessed discretely whilst in others the Workplace Core Skill component was 'signposted' within the occupational standards.

The actual delivery and assessment of Workplace Core Skills was, however, undertaken largely within the workplace (67%, n=18), training centres and then colleges. In particular the Workplace Core Skill of Information Technology was predominately taught and assessed within the training centre or the college.

The majority of the providers used a range of awarding bodies, in particular SQA and City and Guilds. Unless specifically requested, the respondents did not differentiate between the practices of different awarding bodies, although a number gave examples of assessment processes related to external verification.

## Accredited Prior Learning

The overwhelming majority of respondents (n=18) claimed to be aware of the possibility of using Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) processes for assessing Workplace Core Skills. In fact, over 94% claimed to have a basic understanding of the 'Core Skill Profile' and almost all indicated a willingness to identify candidates' existing Core Skills through the use of profiling:

'We always check back to see what they have achieved'  
and

'We do check them when they come in from school to see if they have any Core Skills'.

When questioned, however, respondents associated APL with the Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL) and not the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL). The former was used extensively through the use of school certification and profiling:

'We map the Key Skills that some candidates come to us with SQA Core Skills'.

This is a positive feature of the system that needs to be built upon. More work has to be done to encourage centres to invest resources in using the profiling system, as some seem easily discouraged:

'Nine times of ten it's easier to mark it against what they've actually been doing rather than APL'  
and

'The only trouble with accreditation of prior learning is trying to get the young people to bring their certificates; if they lose them you have to get another one....it is all time'

and

'I think that profiling is a gauge - it's an overall picture but not necessarily an accurate picture for each individual student. Depending on their skills coming to the profiling and their mood on the day it can be variable'.

However, a note of caution should be sounded. Those using APCL believed that the candidates coming from schools had been 'taught' Core Skills through the provision of discrete modules. They were not aware that the Core Skills were largely acquired through 'embedding' them within the wider school curriculum. This often led to stereotypical views on the role of schools in developing Core Skills:

'One candidate claimed to have had all kinds of qualifications and he asked why he couldn't use them. We had to get him to do simple maths'  
and

'Schools don't address them either...they don't know what they are'.

In assessing APCL, just over half of the respondents used SQA profiling computer tools such as ‘Navigator’, whilst approximately 39% used paper-based systems. Surprisingly, only a minority of providers used general computer-based diagnostic tools for identifying existing Core Skills (16%).

As already indicated, very few respondents used APEL. This may reflect the younger age group of the candidates on the MA programmes. However, it is a concern that older candidates’ experience is not being formally recognised and taken into account when undertaking the initial diagnostic assessment of Workplace Core Skills. This quote from a respondent was not untypical:

‘It is more hassle than it is worth...it easier to get them to do it again...’

This reluctance to use APEL could possibly be explained by the funding regime and/or the providers’ lack of confidence and training in offering prior accredited experiential learning frameworks.

When questioned in more detail about APEL, respondents indicated that they would only consider particular types of evidence for Workplace Core Skills. Specifically, the interviewees discussed three related but distinct domains of experience that could provide useful evidence for Workplace Core Skills:

- ◆ School-based activities
- ◆ Work-based activities
- ◆ Wider social-life experiences.

Respondents would use certification for school-based activities, experiential evidence for work-based activities but would not in general accept experiential evidence from wider social and life activities. This appeared to be a rather strange position to take, according to one respondent:

‘It seems odd that we can’t use evidence from someone’s social activities. For instance, minutes from a parent and teachers meeting or social club....’

Interestingly, this apparent closing down of a range of domains of experience for APEL stands in sharp contrast to the current research evidence on Literacy Practices and Basic Skills for older candidates.

Finally, approximately two-thirds of respondents stated that they felt confident and competent in assessing APL claims for Workplace Core Skills. In fact, this meant in practice assessing APCL claims. Interestingly, when asked specifically what qualifications they held in

connection with Workplace Core Skills, only 2% held any awards linked to assessing APL claims.

## Guidance, Support and Progression

Approximately 94% of respondents indicated that they had identified individual training needs for Workplace Core Skills and captured this data within individualised training plans. This appeared to be standard practice across the providers.

Although difficult to calculate, respondents spent on average 1–2 hours on support and guidance for Workplace Core Skills for each candidate. This would seem to be adequate and recognises the diverse needs of candidates and the range of Modern Apprenticeship frameworks. The guidance and support was offered both in one-to-one sessions and in group sessions. For instance:

‘It is an open door policy they have all the contact numbers and I visit them every three to four weeks in the workplace but they can pop in here as well as I’m usually about and we keep really good open communication. It is a very non judgmental process because a lot of it is confidence, they are doing it but they aren’t confident enough to say they are doing it so it is about identifying their own strengths’.

There was little evidence of progression between different levels of Workplace Core Skills. Candidates were allocated a Workplace Core Skills level depending on the apprenticeship framework requirement. This was all that they were expected to complete. We found very few examples of candidates progressing along Workplace Core Skill levels. This may be explained by the funding regime and/or the lack of initial diagnostic assessment or paper based systems.

The vast majority of respondents (67%) encountered difficulties in motivating candidates undertaking Workplace Core Skills. The main reasons for this were the low level of Workplace Core Skills required within the apprenticeship framework and the younger candidates’ previous experience with school-based literacy and numeracy practices.

Although respondents found that candidates were de-motivated by Workplace Core Skills, this did not have a significant impact on retention rates (16% withdrawal rates) or, indeed, on the length of time it took to complete the overall awards (28% said it slowed down completion of the award). One of the reasons for this may be that Workplace Core Skills tended to be left to the end of the Modern Apprenticeship when it came to collecting evidence.

## Design and delivery of Workplace Core Skills

The overwhelming majority of respondents (73%) indicated that the design of Workplace Core Skills learning programmes were undertaken by vocational instructors and assessors and not Core Skills specialist staff within institutions. Only 22% of respondents used Core Skills specialists and these were mainly to be found in colleges and amongst the providers offering 'stand-alone' Workplace Core Skills modules. For instance:

'On a weekly basis, Working with Others and Problem Solving would be done over, what we usually do is if they are on vocational as well so over a five day week, half day on a Friday is Information Technology the other four days are split. We usually have if someone is in particularly for Core Skills we would pull them in for one day a week to do Communication in the morning and Numeracy in the afternoon, we'd try and split it and then the other three days would be their vocational, their Problem Solving and Working with Others which is what they are doing in conjunction with their vocational. So I would say one day per week for Numeracy and Communication. It is just on-going'.

The respondents were asked to say how the five Workplace Core Skills were used within their training programmes using the following framework:

- ◆ Discrete delivery
- ◆ Integrated within a wider programme (explicit)
- ◆ Embedded within existing programme (implicit)

Although there was missing data involved in the analysis (approximately 16%) the most common methods for designing Workplace Core Skills are given below:

Communication	Integrated
Numeracy	Discrete
Information Technology	Integrated
Working with Others	Integrated
Problem Solving	Integrated

The Workplace Core Skills of Working with Others and Problem Solving are overwhelmingly designed as integrated/embedded components of a wider apprenticeship framework. Communication, to a lesser degree, is also often integrated within existing frameworks. Whilst IT retains a discrete component often linked to the 'in-house' availability of computers within training centres, it is largely integrated within the MA frameworks. Numeracy is the only Workplace Core Skill that was found to be offered discretely.

Respondents were then asked to give an indication of how much time was actually spent on the teaching of Workplace Core Skills within their organisations. Although there are again missing data under this category, approximate percentages are given below in Table 11.

**Table 11: Time Spent on the delivery of Workplace Core Skills**

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
0 Days	1	5.6	5.6
0.5 Days	4	22.2	27.8
1 Day	5	27.8	55.6
More than 3 Days	1	5.6	61.1
Missing Data	7	38.9	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

It can be seen from this that very little time is actually being spent on the teaching of Workplace Core Skills. Those teaching for more than one day were more likely to be offering ‘stand-alone’ Workplace Core Skills, with IT being the Workplace Core Skill with a stronger discrete teaching component.

When asked whether sufficient time was spent on the delivery of Workplace Core Skills, the overwhelming majority answered positively (66.7%). The interview data provided some insightful reasons for being satisfied with the current low levels of teaching involved in Workplace Core Skills:

- ‘Core skills are an inconvenience...something that should have been done at school’
- and
- ‘We are not teachers ... we are vocational assessors’
- and
- ‘There is no specified time for teaching Core Skills’.

Within particular awards (eg Management) it was felt that Workplace Core Skills were ‘insulting’, with some providers suggesting that candidates would not be allowed to start Level 3 Management awards if they didn’t already have the required Workplace Core Skills.

The minority of providers who did in fact teach Workplace Core Skills believed that ‘team teaching’ was a positive element of Workplace Core Skill teaching and should be encouraged. Over 50% of providers in this category already used team teaching methods in their delivery of Workplace Core Skills. This group were also interested in collaborating with other centres in the teaching of Workplace Core Skills, although this was not often carried out given the competition between providers.

Although respondents felt that there were problems over motivating candidates on Workplace Core Skills, this did not translate into questioning the value of Workplace Core Skills within the Modern Apprenticeship programmes (Table 12)

**Table 12: What effect do you think Workplace Core Skills may have on the wider purpose of the Modern Apprenticeship?**

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Very positive	4	23.5	23.5
Positive	7	41.2	64.7
Neither positive nor negative	2	11.8	76.5
Negative	1	5.9	82.4
Missing Data	3	17.6	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Interestingly, approximately 73% of respondents believed that the level of Workplace Core Skills within their apprenticeship framework was at the appropriate level for the award. Although many recognised that this was often at a fairly basic level, such as Access 3 and Intermediate 1, they thought that this was appropriate given the background of the candidates undertaking the awards.

## Assessment of Workplace Core Skills

Just over half of the respondents indicated that they used diagnostic assessment tools. This mainly consisted of pre-entry tests of candidates for MA programmes and school certification based upon profiling. There was no evidence to suggest the systematic use by providers of entry level diagnostic assessments of Workplace Core Skills.

The overwhelming majority of respondents (72%) used continuous assessment practices when assessing Workplace Core Skills. Approximately 22% of the respondents used only summative assessment. Interestingly, 84% claimed to use reassessment (remediation) practices thus allowing candidates to retake Workplace Core Skills. However, very few candidates seemed to ‘fail’ assessments and there was little documentary evidence of ‘repeat’ assessments. There is no independent assessment of Workplace Core Skills, for example through external examination.

The respondents were asked to list the most important assessment methods used for Workplace Core Skills. The most commonly occurring method by far was the ‘weaving of evidence through an existing portfolio’. This tended to occur towards the end of the Modern Apprenticeship and often resulted in additional evidence being ‘bolted-on’ to a portfolio (usually at the back). Respondents argued that this ‘naturally-occurring evidence’ was appropriate for the collection of

evidence on Workplace Core Skills. However, it was difficult at times to see what was ‘natural’ about the process as it appeared often to replicate what already existed within the portfolios.

Data was collected on the time spent on assessing Workplace Core Skills. This was difficult to calculate for a number of providers and there is, therefore, a 33% non-response rate on this question. However, the data that is available is illuminating.

**Table 13: How much time do you spend assessing Workplace Core Skills?**

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
0 Days	1	5.6	5.6
0.5 Days	4	22.2	27.8
1 Day	5	27.8	55.6
2.5 Days	1	5.6	61.1
More than 3 Days	1	5.6	66.7
Missing Data	6	33.3	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

It can be seen that on average providers are spending between half to one day on the assessment of Workplace Core Skills per candidate. Given that respondents are using ‘naturally-occurring evidence’ then these figures would seem realistic. This is confirmed in a later question when the majority of respondents claim that sufficient time is spent on the assessment of Workplace Core Skills (78%).

Providers tended to use a range of support materials for assessing Workplace Core Skills. The following were the most popular:

- ◆ ‘Guidelines on assessing Workplace Core Skills’ (SQA, 2001)
- ◆ awarding body packs
- ◆ locally-generated resources
- ◆ website materials
- ◆ other

Often providers would adapt the awarding bodies pack to meet local circumstances (often referred to as a ‘good start’). The majority of these locally-generated assessment materials (67%) were subsequently approved by the respective awarding body through the external verification visit.

Overall, respondents were satisfied with the assessment of Workplace Core Skills. Only 33% said that they were dissatisfied. The main reasons given for this were the administrative burden involved in assessment and the requirement by some external verifiers to collect ‘repeat’ evidence on Workplace Core Skills rather than use ‘naturally-occurring’ evidence from the Modern Apprenticeship portfolio. According to one respondent:

‘It should be naturally-occurring evidence so it doesn’t become a paper-chase’.

The only other critical comment made about awarding body information concerned the SQA website. This was not perceived of as ‘intuitive’ or easy to navigate by respondents.

## Resources

The respondents were asked whether sufficient time was allocated within their organisations for developing support materials for Workplace Core Skills. Approximately 90% answered this question positively.

There were very positive responses to the questions related to IT resources and their availability to support Workplace Core Skills training. Over 77% said they were highly satisfied with their IT resources. This response was confirmed by the more senior staff, the overwhelming majority (78%) of whom also claimed that their organisation’s IT facilities were very good.

A particular area of dispute between the respondents was their perceptions of the funding mechanisms used to support Workplace Core Skills. The respondents were equally split on the question of whether the current funding levels enabled them to effectively deliver Workplace Core Skills. These diverse responses to funding were also reflected in the comments by the more senior people in the organisations.

## Staff Development

The respondents were asked to list their current qualifications. Over 90% had subject-based qualifications linked to the Modern Apprenticeship framework and the Assessor awards. These staff were mainly instructor/assessors directly working with Workplace Core Skills candidates. Only 15% of the respondents had or were working towards Core Skill awards and very few had a teaching qualification. The most appropriately qualified staff tended to work in centres that provided stand-alone Workplace Core Skill awards.

The respondents were asked about the amount of training they had received on Workplace Core Skills. The responses are given in Table 14.

**Table 14: How much training have you received on Workplace Core Skills?**

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
0 Days	4	22.2	22.2
0.5 Days	1	5.6	27.8
1 Day	4	22.2	50.0
2 Days	2	11.1	61.1

3 Days	1	5.6	66.7
More than 3 Days	3	16.7	83.3
Missing Data	3	16.7	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

From the responses it is obvious that the majority of those delivering and assessing Workplace Core Skills had themselves received a very limited amount of training.

A second question was asked of the respondents about the amount of training they had received on Workplace Core Skills. This time the focus was on the past calendar year. The responses given by the providers are given in Table 15.

**Table 15: Over the past calendar year, how much time on staff development have you spent specifically on Workplace Core Skills?**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
0 Days	5	27.8	27.8
0.5 Days	5	27.8	55.6
1 Day	2	11.1	66.7
2 Days	1	5.6	72.2
3 Days	1	5.6	77.8
More than 3 Days	1	5.6	83.3
Missing Data	3	16.7	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Again it can be seen that the level of training on Workplace Core Skills was extremely limited. There is an argument here that the lack teaching of Workplace Core Skills follows a ‘self-perpetuating’ cycle as teachers become ill-equipped to teach candidates due to the lack of teaching in Workplace Core Skills they receive themselves.

The respondents were asked to rank the level of support they received on Workplace Core Skills from a range of different sources. The responses were as follows (respondents could give a number of responses):

Line Manager	33%
Awarding bodies	28%
Core Skill Specialist	17%
Vocational Instructor	6%
External Verifier	6%
Other	17%

In general terms, respondents were happy with the level of support received from colleagues. Over 74% claimed to have received the support required to deliver and assess Workplace Core Skills, while 94% claimed that they had access to feedback on their teaching and assessment practices.

## Conceptualising Workplace Core Skills

The respondents were asked whether they thought Workplace Core Skills were:

- ◆ General transferable skills
- ◆ Occupationally-specific skills
- ◆ Context/task-specific skills

Approximately 95% said that Workplace Core Skills were general transferable skills.

The interviewers then proceeded to closely question the respondents on the nature of these skills in order to identify specific examples of how Workplace Core Skills were applied in practice. All the examples given were of context-specific skills linked to a particular organisation or within an occupation. For instance:

- ◆ calculating heat loss from a radiator (service engineer)
- ◆ writing a child development record (child care)
- ◆ computer register of children (child care)
- ◆ calculating colour correction (hairdressing)
- ◆ computer fault finding on cars (mechanics)
- ◆ calculating temperatures on fridge/freezer (catering)

The level of understanding of the above tasks was often rather superficial. The broader underlying principles involved were rarely discussed. The assessment processes tended to reinforce this ‘instrumental’ approach to skills. Candidates were often only required to produce evidence of Workplace Core Skills on a sampling basis (two occasions for example), which tended to reinforce an assessment-driven rather than curriculum-driven model of learning.

Finally, respondents were asked whether they thought Workplace Core Skills were individual and/or collective competencies. Approximately, 16% of respondents believed them to be individual competencies, 22% believed them to be collective competencies and 62% claimed that they were a combination of both. This is an interesting finding as much of the assessment and teaching of Workplace Core Skills is based upon the notion of ‘individual competencies’ that are transferable across occupational boundaries.

## Good practice in the delivery and assessment of Workplace Core Skills

The ‘best practice’ examples of the teaching and assessment of Workplace Core Skills were found in organisations that offered discrete

Workplace Core Skill Units that were linked to an ‘employability’ agenda eg Ready for Work.

Providers are beginning to use the SQA ‘profiling’ system and this is reflected in good practice in accrediting certificated prior learning from schools.

For more mature candidates it is possible to accredit prior experiential learning from across a range of work-based, social and life-skill domains. However, this would require additional training for vocational assessors to equip them with the appropriate APEL skills.

The majority of providers are using Individual Learning Plans and offering some degree of individual guidance and support to candidates.

There is little evidence of progression taking place within the Workplace Core Skill levels. Those providers who offered progression from Intermediate 1 to Intermediate 2 awards generally used diagnostic assessment tools that placed the candidates on the appropriate level of Workplace Core Skills. This practice should be more widely encouraged across the Workplace Core Skills providers.

There was limited evidence of ‘best practice’ in the design and delivery of the Workplace Core Skills curriculum. In fact, there was no shared notion of what a curriculum for the five Core Skills would look like in terms of coverage and depth of study. Awarding bodies need to consider offering guidelines on the design and delivery of Workplace Core Skills which is comparable with the guidelines issued on assessing Workplace Core Skills.

Workplace Core Skills were more effectively delivered by instructors when a specified number of hours were allocated to teaching the required Workplace Core Skills. There was evidence to suggest that instructors often conflated teaching with assessment.

The most effective way to design Workplace Core Skills was to make them context-specific to the occupation and thus directly relevant to the candidates. There was lots of existing good practice from providers on doing this.

There was ample evidence of good practice in the assessment of Workplace Core Skills. The use of ‘naturally-occurring’ evidence should be encouraged, although this should not be left until the end of the Modern Apprenticeship or ‘bolted-on’ to the portfolio. External Verifiers need to support assessors in the use of continuous assessment practices for Workplace Core Skills that are based upon existing ‘naturally-occurring’ evidence.

The awarding body packs for assessing Workplace Core Skills are extensively used by providers. Generally speaking, the packs are seen as

a 'good start' and are adapted by users to meet local circumstances. This flexibility in the use of the packs should be encouraged.

The 'best practice' providers tended to employ qualified instructors and teachers to design, deliver and assess Workplace Core Skills. This often meant staff had to have or be 'working towards' having a recognised teaching qualification and Core Skills award. It was not deemed sufficient by these centres for staff to have only an occupationally relevant qualification and/or Assessor award.

Finally, the excellent centres in the sample of case studies tended to have a coherent 'Continuous Professional Development' programme for their staff that involved on-going training in pedagogic and assessment related issues linked specifically to Workplace Core Skills.

## 8 Case Studies of Workplace Core Skills Providers

The six case studies are selected from the 20 case studies that formed part of the interviews with staff from the Workplace Core Skills centres. The six case studies come from across all the awarding bodies. They are offered as examples of Workplace Core Skill practices and include elements of 'best practice'. The respondents in the interviews generally did not differentiate between Core Skills and Workplace Core Skills in linguistic terms.

### Case Study 1

This medium-sized centre is based in Dundee. The centre does not offer Modern Apprenticeships but does deliver the Workplace Core Skills as stand-alone Units and they are 'not linked to a wider qualification framework'. The MAs are seen as being 'two levels beyond what we do'. The centre is involved in 'Get Ready for Work' and 'New Deal' programmes, including Personal Social Development (PSD). At any one time they may only have three or four candidates working specifically on Workplace Core Skills. The majority of candidates are referred to the centre by Careers Scotland.

There are two assessors who 'specialise' in the delivery of Workplace Core Skills but all the other assessors 'can support it because of the nature of the work that we do'. The delivery and assessment of the Workplace Core Skills takes place in the training room within the centre.

The centre is engaged in all aspects of employability for their candidates and with supporting them in that process, consequently, not all of their clients are training. The majority of candidates who are engaged in formal training programmes are working towards a level 1 in their chosen vocational area, many of whom will go on to work on site or in workshops. The awarding body used for certification is mainly City & Guilds with SQA being used for the certification of the Workplace Core Skills.

Again, it was clear that the centre were aware of, and did use, APCL. The assessor would check the candidates' qualifications from school, for example the Scottish Qualifications Certificate (SQC), along with any previous education, sometimes referring back to the Careers Service or a previous training provider, if necessary. If they were 'really in any doubt' they would 'phone SQA'.

In addition, APL is sometimes used in 'conjunction with the vocational'. One respondent explained, 'if the client comes in and they haven't achieved certain standards at school but they want to do a vocational, for example general building, but they hadn't achieved a certain standard of,

say, communication, we would make sure Workplace Core Skills were built into the vocational before they went ahead and did any vocational modules’.

The centre was not using APEL as a method of accrediting prior achievement learning however, they have in the past, used portfolios of evidence that had been collated by Mitchell Street (Community Learning) to see ‘how far they have got to’.

The centre did undertake initial profiling of each candidate through the use of the Basic Skills Agency packs on literacy and numeracy. These were recently updated. Different versions are used to avoid any plagiarism on the client’s part.

From the initial action plan that is usually received upon referral from Careers Scotland, the centre will then devise a training plan during the induction period for each candidate.

In terms of delivery of Workplace Core Skills, on a weekly basis the centre spends half a day each on Numeracy, Communication and IT and feels that this is sufficient. Problem Solving and Working with Others are contained within the vocational element of their training. The candidates are ‘given a set amount of time each week to come out of the workshops and into the training room to work through their packs and folders’. Under normal circumstances the assessor ‘would be available however many times a week as need be to spend time with one, two or three candidates’. On many occasions, one-to-one sessions are also offered ‘particularly for the younger ones who are more reluctant to sit in a group session’. Any locally-generated resources are designed mainly by an assessor who holds a Basic Skills Teaching Certificate.

The centre collaborates quite regularly with other centres in order to share materials and ideas through network meetings.

The centre does offer an initial diagnostic assessment for their candidates in the form of the Basic Skills Agency packs. In addition, if the candidate is operating at a level below, say, Access 3 then the centre can offer contingencies through City & Guilds adult literacy units. In terms of the time spent on assessment, the centre spends one day on each of the five Workplace Core Skills. The centre only has approval to deliver Access 3 level Workplace Core Skills, however, higher qualifications other than this Workplace Core Skill level are on offer. It is more likely that the candidate would ‘progress on to a higher vocational qualification’. In assessing the Workplace Core Skills the SQA exemplar packs are used as a guide.

The centre has not had to address the issue of reassessment yet as ‘I wouldn’t put anyone through it unless I was sure that they were ready’.

All staff are professionally qualified in their vocational area. All have Assessor/Verifier awards (D32/33/34 or A/V Units) and one has a Basic Skills Teaching Certificate. None of the staff had any specific qualifications in relation to Workplace Core Skills. Initially, new staff spent time shadowing other members of staff.

### **Areas of best practice**

There was evidence of a great deal of regular collaboration with other centres and the centre was quite familiar with other training providers in the Dundee area. This demonstrates a high level of networking and co-operation that can only benefit all those involved and ultimately benefits all candidates.

There appeared to be a good deal of thought and guidance put into the starting point for each candidate which led to a much more individualised training plan. This could be due, in part, to the fact that the Workplace Core Skills were delivered as 'stand-alone' Units however, the benefit to the candidate appeared great.

There was a great deal of emphasis placed on employability skills within the centre overall which Workplace Core Skills Units can only help to strengthen.

In general, the centre felt that a 'higher Unit cost would allow for a greater staffing ratio'.

## **Case Study 2**

This medium-sized centre is based in Glasgow but has centres throughout the country. They are about to move to a new custom-built building around December 2006. The centre offers the Workplace Core Skills through Modern Apprenticeships. At any one time they may have 1,000 candidates training with them.

The centre has approximately 21 assessors involved in the delivery of Workplace Core Skills. These are split into two teams, Business Services (× 6) and Technical Services (×15). The delivery and assessment takes place in the candidates' place of work, with the exception of the IT Workplace Core Skill, which is usually delivered within the training centre in groups of about 10.

The centre offers an extensive range of Modern Apprenticeships including: Light Vehicle Technician, Vehicle Parts Operations, Vehicle and Body Repair Operations, Customer Service, Business and Administration, Management and IT Users. Nearly all the Workplace Core Skills are certificated at Intermediate 1 with the exception of the Light Vehicle Technician, which has all five Workplace Core Skills certificated at Intermediate 2. Many of the MA frameworks on offer have

the Workplace Core Skills embedded but again, for those that don't, the SQA Workplace Core Skills packs are used for those components that cannot be evidenced through the candidates' other portfolio work. With IT being the exception, a whole day's training course has been devised for the delivery and assessment of this Workplace Core Skill. The awarding body used for certification is mainly The Institute of the Motor Industry (IMI) with SQA being used for the certification of the Workplace Core Skills.

Again, it was clear that the centre were aware of, and did use, APCL. The assessor would check the candidates' qualifications from school (SQC) to confirm if they had achieved the required level and keep a 'photocopy of their certificate in their portfolio'.

However, most of the candidates the centre deals with are older candidates 'who have been out of school for a long time ... [so] their certificate would no longer be current'. If the candidates haven't got 'proof', the centre would 'do some other form of testing through questioning or observation'.

The centre does not produce Individual Learning Plans for the candidates but the recruitment specialists who take the candidates on to the MA initially do create a training plan which is passed on so they are 'well aware of what they've got to do'. The 'qualifications are structured as a Vocational Qualification plus other agreed Units for the MA. We don't look at Workplace Core Skills until the end ... and therefore have antagonism from [the candidates] which we have to deal with'. The centre does sometimes have difficulty in motivating the candidates: 'they can't understand the requirement for Workplace Core Skills when they look at what they have already done [in their VQ]'.

One respondent did feel the Workplace Core Skills 'were a waste of time' ... 'I don't see any reason why they have to do the Workplace Core Skills but I can see with the work that they are doing that they are fully capable of understanding what is required ...'.

In terms of delivery of Workplace Core Skills, the centre spent half a day on each Workplace Core Skill, with the exception of IT, which was given one whole day and this was deemed to be sufficient. 'For everything it will be very minimal, it will become part of the on-going assessment' ... 'we are looking for evidence to cover this particular task'. In the 'assessor's mind' they are looking for 'bits and pieces that will marry both standards together' however, the respondent did not feel that 'the two worked together'. This respondent felt 'either the person has those Workplace Core Skills or does not have them' and did not feel that the level of Workplace Core Skills candidates need to achieve is appropriate for their award.

The centre does not use any form of diagnostic assessment for candidates, as 'it is the awarding bodies that dictate that these are the

requirements of the qualification'. There are no opportunities for progression nor are there any contingencies in place for those candidates who may be operating at a level below that required for their chosen MA. The team are 'looking at the candidate not the Workplace Core Skills'.

In terms of the time spent on assessment of the Workplace Core Skills, the centre spent 1 to 1.5 hours on Numeracy and one day on IT (the others are embedded). The main methods of assessment were through witness testimony, observation and discussion. If a candidate was 'not yet competent' they would be given the opportunity to be re-assessed with a different task. One respondent would like to see changes in the arrangements for assessment by 'putting them into the standards' ie embedding them all, as it is 'additional work'.

All staff are professionally qualified in their vocational area and all have Assessor/Verifier awards (D32/33/34 or A/V Units). None of the staff had any specific qualifications in relation to Workplace Core Skills.

### **Areas of best practice**

The centre took the integrated approach with Workplace Core Skills in as far as possible and had a 'tracking device which is a matrix specifically created ... for each Workplace Core Skill'. The 'Core Skills fit into the delivery of the vocational qualification so they are not seen as an added extra. The candidates generate sufficient evidence from their portfolio'.

The one-day IT training session seemed particularly good and if this is at too high a level for some candidates 'we can bring them in again and put them through a computer course for beginners'. The candidates are given a manual/workbook to work through.

The centre did give the candidates opportunities for re-assessment. In general, the centre felt frustrated that they 'still had to spend as much time on Workplace Core Skills' citing that 'kids have gone through schooling and not attained it ... and we have 18 months to complete a VQ plus the Workplace Core Skills'.

## **Case Study 3**

Centre Three is a medium-sized (relative to the number of candidates enrolled on Workplace Core Skills), public sector centre (college) in an urban context. Interviews were conducted with a strategic representative in her role as Adult Literacy and Numeracy Lecturer. The former regarded his role in relation to Workplace Core Skills as one which 'develops training and learning opportunities for people in the workplace', while the latter explained that she does not deliver Workplace Core Skills as part of the Modern Apprenticeships programme, instead her role is to 'support students who are doing

Workplace Core Skills Units as Life Skills'. In this centre, Workplace Core Skills policies and Literacy and Numeracy policies dovetail.

The Workplace Core Skills course is delivered in-house as part of the Modern Apprenticeship. Their Workplace Core Skills usage is also linked to the CABS access to fabrication and welding course offered by that centre. All candidates are required to achieve Intermediate 1 assessment levels as dictated by the framework. Enrolments have been limited so far but numbers are likely to increase because of pressure to expand Modern Apprenticeships.

Although she would consider using work-based, school-based and wider social activities/life experiences, the operational representative indicated she did not feel confident and competent in assessing APL to take account of the experience that candidates bring to Workplace Core Skills and was 'unsure about the possibility of using APEL for Workplace Core Skills' at her centre. She expanded, 'I think there would have to be time allocated to this and some guidelines'. At present, this respondent had not had 'any training in APEL in relation to Workplace Core Skills specifically'.

The operation representative at this centre indicated that they used a 'Core Skills diagnostic tool within the college eg PLATO' and profiling tools to identify existing levels of skill in the Workplace Core Skills curriculum areas. She did, however, indicate that there had been some difficulties in using this diagnostic tool: 'I think it is a gauge, it's not an overall picture and not necessarily an accurate picture for each individual student dependant on their skills coming to the profiling and their mood on the day it can be variable'.

Candidates are advised and supported in gathering evidence which they build in to portfolios. Those working in a garage gather evidence from activities which naturally occur in the workplace. Assessors ensure that candidates are aware of the requirements of the course and that they produce appropriate evidence for assessment. Some tasks are simulated since opportunities do not naturally occur for some candidates to, for example, develop Information Technology skills in their workplaces. The strategic representative regarded himself as 'an advocate for Workplace Core Skills', asserting that Workplace Core Skills 'ought to happen naturally' but he realises that 'candidates may be unaware of what is required of them and that there is a lot of evidencing by default'.

The operational representative at this centre explained that some Workplace Core Skills Units were delivered in the classroom but that, where possible, candidates gather information for the Life Skills course in their workplace. She works 'with Childcare and Motor Vehicle students and we have tried to use the Workplace Core Skills in a contextualised format in the workplace'.

She explained that ‘within the Life Skills each individual student has a log book and within that they have to identify smart goals’ so there is some evidence of identifying individual candidate’s training needs at this centre. Workplace Core Skills candidates are given guidance both in individual and group contexts.

She indicated that she had encountered some difficulties in motivating candidates about Workplace Core Skills: ‘some of the students are wondering what the relevance of this is to the overall objective’ ie their vocational qualification.

She explained that arrangements were in place to ‘roll out the training with the framework and we are going to link in the AL framework into the Life Skills so they will be just in time to evaluate how this is going with the work-based assessment’.

The operational representative at this centre expressed concern about the disparity of the high level required by the vocational qualification and the low level of assessment of Workplace Core Skills. She questioned, ‘What was the point of a youngster operating at VQ level 3 yet they are only asked for Access 3 in their Workplace Core Skills? I don’t see the point in that. I think there is an issue there’.

The operational and strategic representatives were asked about contingency arrangements for candidates operating at a level below that required for their chosen qualification. The strategic representative indicated that the Workplace Core Skills model is ‘predominantly assessment-driven as opposed to support-driven’.

The operational representative at this centre indicated that the *Guide to Assessing Workplace Core Skills* (SQA, 2000) is a useful tool for reference. The Life Skills team at this centre then develop resources based on this. Unfortunately this centre did not provide copies of resources they had developed to enable researchers to comment on the quality or ingenuity of these.

The operational representative at this centre was unusual (for our cohort) in holding a teaching qualification (TQFE), subject-based qualification and an Assessor Award as indicators of competence in delivering and assessing Workplace Core Skills.

She did, however, feel that she would have benefited from greater initial support and advice on Workplace Core Skills than she received. She was ‘just given the Workplace Core Skills pack and had to get on with it’. At that stage, she would have welcomed ‘time to become more familiar of what is expected within the Unit and how we are going to relate it to the courses and the students’.

The strategic representative of this centre felt that greater time ought to be allocated to developing the delivery and resources for Workplace Core

Skills. He indicated there should be ‘dedicated and protected Workplace Core Skills time’ to facilitate this.

The strategic representative also indicated that Workplace Core Skills are challenging to manage since so many different personnel are involved. He explained, ‘Vocational specialists administer SQA Workplace Core Skills and gather the appropriate evidence and are linked to Core Skills Specialists’. He felt that the provision could and should be better integrated and expressed concern that ‘much of the Workplace Core Skills provision is ad hoc and differs even within one institution’. He suggests that staff in his centre ‘would welcome greater support in terms of training sessions from the awarding body to help with the ongoing development of resources, to provide up-to-date information on delivery and assessment procedures for Workplace Core Skills’.

At the end of the interview, this respondent expressed concern about issues of equity surrounding the parity of esteem of Workplace Core Skills and conventional Core Skills in the employment marketplace.

The strategic representative at this centre felt that ‘Core Skills is a victim of its own innovation’ and that although it met the needs of employers when first introduced, it needs to be under continual review to ensure its fulfilling its purpose.

He also indicated, ‘It is difficult to deliver Workplace Core Skills remotely. It was not economical for us to do visits so what we had to do was three tasks and have the supervisor of the workplace supervise these tasks and sign them off and although, at the time, we outlined the Numeracy task to the employer they squawked at it because it was such a low level, asking “is that all they need to do” but actually it was very poor, and was probably just because of the students’ lack of knowledge of exam technique, ratios, how to read this off a graph etc. and it was very difficult to support this remotely’.

## **Areas of best practice**

This centre has just formed a Core Skills Committee with staff and candidate representatives in attendance ‘to ensure high levels of customer care and to assure quality’. This was established to be responsive to the needs of candidates and demonstrates a commitment to the continuous improvement and development of programmes. Staff in this centre are evaluating delivery of Workplace Core Skills to Motor Vehicle Apprenticeships as part of the pilot process.

The strategic representative at this centre explained that ‘last year we were approached by an outside organisation to help them with their Work-Based Core Skills and the two areas were Numeracy and IT’. It may, therefore, be beneficial for some centres, where good practice is evident, to assume an advisory or ambassadorial role and to support centres which are either offering Workplace Core Skills to candidates for

the first time or experiencing difficulties in developing resources, delivering or assessing Workplace Core Skills. For private sector centres concerned about losing their competitive edge in the marketplace by sharing creative resources and good practice, it may be worth appointing an independent body or the awarding body recruiting staff to designate or ring-fence funds for this purpose.

There was evidence, in this centre, of team-teaching that the operational representative felt was beneficial both to the delivery of Workplace Core Skills and to the development of resources.

## Case Study 4

Centre Four is a medium-sized, private sector centre (educational training provider) in an urban context. Workplace Core Skills delivery and assessment is well-established in this centre and training is provided in-house and in the workplace. There are six assessors of Workplace Core Skills in this centre. The training manager of this centre was interviewed.

Workplace Core Skills are delivered as part of the Modern Apprenticeships (SVQ level 3) in Customer Service, Retail, Management and, more recently, in Hospitality Supervision.

The respondent was aware of using APEL in relation to Workplace Core Skills and of identifying candidates' existing Core Skills Profiles. She explained that 'the most annoying thing is that in gathering APEL for Core Skills, the SQA only provide information from school not from college so then we've got to contact the Skills Centre to see if they'll accept a qualification as a Workplace Core Skill. In the main, we've got them assessed correctly'.

She understands the Core Skills Profile and how it relates to the Vocational awards offered by her centre. Her centre uses Scottish Qualifications Certificates and go on to the SQA system to find out what level they have achieved but some candidates come from England, Wales or Ireland and then a problem is encountered in terms of 'matching up their qualifications and prior experience with Workplace Core Skills levels'.

This centre uses work-based, school-based (which show up on school certificates) and wider life experiences to give credit for prior learning. In terms of wider life experiences, this may come from activities they 'have done in the past. If their workplace hasn't generated anything specific, if they are the member of a youth club or something that they might do outside work that might just involve it'.

This respondent feels both confident and competent in identifying prior experience that candidates bring to Workplace Core Skills explaining that, 'if you know the standard and you've read the standards that are

required, we're used to assessing candidates so we can find out what they've done previously'.

She had not had training in APEL in relation to Workplace Core Skills specifically.

Candidates' individual training needs are identified by this centre. The respondent explained that, 'We do an Individual Learning or Training Plan and when it comes to Workplace Core Skills. It's again what they've done in the past and what they need to learn'.

The respondent identified her role as helping to devise training materials that are required to support Workplace Core Skills candidates. She explained that assessors at her centre give candidates directions on how to complete Workplace Core Skills as Modern Apprentices. She felt it was difficult to estimate how much time she spends delivering Workplace Core Skills to candidates explaining that, 'Well the thing is there are different levels of Workplace Core Skills and there are different levels of candidates and there are different levels of job roles so I don't think you can actually say on average how long it would take. You could have a candidate who's never had the chance to do it but could rattle off and do a Workplace Core Skill and exemplar exercises in no time at all. 'You could have somebody who you think is, for instance, a couple of weeks ago I had an Administration candidate who was absolutely brilliant at Administration but she didn't have the Numeracy and when it came to doing Numeracy, she was at a much lower level and it was much more difficult then to get through it but I would have expected her just to rattle through it but she didn't. For some candidates it is appropriate to assess them immediately, for others more support and training is required'.

Guidance on Workplace Core Skills is given to candidates on a one-to-one basis at this centre.

Opportunities for progression are not offered to candidates at this centre. Once they have achieved their Award, this is where their Workplace Core Skills involvement ends.

The respondent had encountered many difficulties in motivating candidates about Workplace Core Skills. She commented, 'Especially in the older bracket they don't see why they need to do them because they've been probably holding down a management role for a few years. We do have some opportunities for delivering Management level 3. That is very tangible because the Workplace Core Skills are embedded into it. For some of the older candidates, they've been doing the job for so many years, why do they need to go back and do some Numeracy exercises? They feel it's beneath them'. These skills are not recognised from previous work they have done. Some of the younger candidates also feel resentment towards Workplace Core Skills, 'we get quite a few 22–25 year olds who probably haven't done it at school but they've been

working for five or six years in working tills or maybe managing a shop and then you ask them to actually complete a Numeracy Intermediate 1 or something and it really is beneath them at least they think it is until they try do to some of the exercises’.

She explained there was no difficulty in retaining candidates at this centre because the Workplace Core Skills course is integrated into the Modern Apprenticeship, ‘if they don’t do it, they don’t get the Modern Apprenticeship basically’. The respondent continued, ‘We have had complaints from candidates about Workplace Core Skills but no refusals’. She empathised with some of these candidates commenting, ‘we have no choice in doing Workplace Core Skills.’

She felt that Workplace Core Skills does not slow down the completion of the VQ award overall. The Workplace Core Skills are left til the end of the Modern Apprenticeship so that evidence from previous work in their VQ can be pulled in, avoiding unnecessary duplication.

The respondent perceived her role to be one of ensuring that ‘each candidate has reached the standard required for their qualification’.

She feels that ‘Information Technology and Working with Others can be integrated into existing work programmes if carefully managed and so it doesn’t affect funding’.

No team teaching occurs at this centre. The respondent added, ‘effective team teaching is relative to the subject you are teaching’.

In her view, Workplace Core Skills are individual competencies because ‘individuals are carrying them’. She believes Core Skills are transferable, ‘they can, presumably, be used in any job they go into and will be of use to them’.

Staff at this centre involved in Workplace Core Skills use awarding body packs and augment this with locally-generated resources which are approved by the awarding body. The respondent explained, ‘We have in-house training facilities because our colleagues are delivering Key Skills down south. We can go into those and pick out any parts that might be useful and adapt them for Workplace Core Skills’.

The respondent feels that the Workplace Core Skills levels are appropriate for the Vocational Qualification Awards. Although she did comment that, ‘Working with Others Intermediate 2 could be a bit higher for some’.

No diagnostic assessments are made of candidates’ skills at this centre; instead they match existing evidence of skills to the requirements of the Modern Apprenticeship. Additional training/exercises are provided for those candidates who ‘get on the wrong track until they get the hang of it’.

The respondent indicated that much of the Workplace Core Skills activity in her centre focuses on final assessments rather than on delivery. She explained that ‘in some cases there is some training involved because they’re not used to IT systems but I think IT is the only one training comes into’. She expands on this in her comment that: ‘as far as IT skills are concerned a candidate might not have the opportunity within their job role to actually use a computer or prove on a computer that they can do it and that means bringing them into the centre and starting from scratch and making sure that they can use it and know what is involved’. As a consequence, IT is sometimes delivered as a discrete Unit and delivered as a different mode because of this. She feels that enough time devoted to the assessment of Workplace Core Skills. The respondent feels that ‘the majority have just come through school and should be coming out at a certain level anyway. The majority have got their Workplace Core Skills from school. The one they don’t usually come out with is Working with Others unless in the Sixth Form at Intermediate 1 or 2. If any, it’s the one they don’t have’. So there seems to be a hiatus in this Core Skill area which is identified when they enter tertiary education or training.

In this centre every effort is made to weave evidence into the candidates’ SVQ portfolio. Opportunities are made for them ‘to type up the work they were doing for IT. Each Unit is specific so it’s difficult to do — you could give a page for each, depending on the area you’re working in. We work with the individual and help them to decide how they can best produce the evidence, and wrap Workplace Core Skills around that’.

Candidates are given opportunities for reassessment at this centre. Assessors guide candidates to produce a certain level of evidence for their Award. Sometimes this involves ‘producing evidence in a specific manner or expanding on something’.

The respondent did not suggest any changes to existing assessment procedures for Workplace Core Skills.

The respondent believed that the exemplar exercises provided within the awarding body packs are useful.

This representative of this centre had a subject-based qualification, Assessor award and Core Skill award as evidence of her competence to deliver and assess Workplace Core Skills.

She felt she received very good initial advice from a knowledgeable source regarding the delivery and assessment of Workplace Core Skills.

Monthly moderation meetings were held in this centre to discuss subject areas and her centre adopted an open-door approach to supporting staff. Time is protected in this centre to develop in-house resources. If out in the workplace, staff felt they could phone for advice from colleagues if problems were encountered.

On-going training on Workplace Core Skills takes place in this centre both in terms of monitoring and evaluation to ensure standards of delivery, consistency of approach and equity of assessment. External Verifiers provide training and training is also derived from colleagues through feedback and reflective practice.

The respondent felt that staff at her centre ‘would benefit from more exemplar exercises to make sure we’re going down the right lines bearing [in] mind we’ve just received an external verifier for Numeracy and that’s the first time in four years and that applies to all the other moderators as well’. So greater external support would be appreciated, as would more regular contact with the awarding body. She also felt that it was ‘difficult to find out information on courses or training from the awarding body’.

Reflecting on her experience of talking to candidates, they frequently ask, ‘why do they have to do them? Why do they need them? They left that behind them at school’. One of the major disincentives of Workplace Core Skills seems to be in the delivery, of the school-based approach utilised in a workplace context. She explained, ‘That’s why we try to pick up as much through the workplace activities because if you have to sit them down to do exercises for IT and for Numeracy or stand up and do a presentation they did that at school, they don’t want to know.’

## **Areas of Best Practice**

This centre looks at Workplace Core Skills on a regular basis and evaluates the effectiveness of resources and approaches.

Staff at this centre collaborate with 40 other centres (including English ones) to develop work in this area.

This centre also provides candidates with opportunities to develop IT skills using the European Computer Driving Licence and enhances candidates’ future employability.

## **Case Study 5**

Centre Five is a small-sized employer in an urban context with six Workplace Core Skills assessors. This centre has not, until recently, had many candidates over the age of 25. The respondent explained that ‘because we are funding driven we don’t have a lot of candidates over 25 but recently we have had some funding for over 25 which has just started so we’ve not got the ball rolling on that.’ The respondent has been involved in the teaching and assessment of Workplace Core Skills since its inception.

This centre delivers Workplace Core Skills in-house, in the training centre, but also in the workplace to Modern Apprenticeship candidates

enrolled on the SVQ level 3 Hairdressing course. Candidates are required to achieve Working with Others, Problem Solving, Communication and Information Technology at Intermediate 1 level and Numeracy at Access 3 level.

The respondent is aware of the possibility of using Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) for Workplace Core Skills. She explained that the centre checks Scottish Qualifications Certificates to identify candidates' existing Core Skills profiles to establish which subject areas and levels of Workplace Core Skills, if any, they have completed at school. If they have already attained the Core Skill level required (or above this level) they are not required to repeat them. This certification is sent to the awarding body in the industry to indicate they have already achieved the Core Skills required for SVQ level 2 and level 3. The respondent explained, 'whether it has come from us or the schools doesn't matter as long as they can prove they have got it'. The only difficulty this respondent had with Core Skills profiling is 'trying to get the young people to bring their certificates; if they lose them you have to get another one — it is all time. It's not a high percentage it's just the odd one'.

This centre takes account of the candidates' work-based, school-based and wider social activities/life experiences on entering as Modern Apprentices. The respondent believed Workplace Core Skills to be general skills that are transferable, demonstrating collective competencies. She explained that 'all the skills can be used in other contexts, even socially — beyond the workplace'. Although she did not have any training in APL in relation to Workplace Core Skills specifically, she has been trained more generally in APL. The respondent feels confident and competent in assessing APL to take account of the experience that candidates bring to Workplace Core Skills. She justifies this in her explanation that 'we have the initial assessment in place which we do at induction which recognises any APL and it is really just experience.' The respondent explained that 'when they come to do level 3 which is then going onto the MA certificate they have to do a skills test which covers the practical and they have to answer questions which identify any training needed'.

Induction for candidates into Workplace Core Skills is led by the industry bodies so the respondent explains, 'the one we use is a HABIA-preferred induction'.

Candidates are offered quite a lot of support and guidance in relation to Workplace Core Skills in this centre in a one-to-one and group context. As the respondent explained, 'we don't really keep that as a separate issue; it is integrated and because the Workplace Core Skills work well with Hairdressing so you can naturally gather that evidence. Some of them see their assessor every week some see their assessor every four weeks. They are giving them the support to do with the NVQ but also the

Core Skills at the same time. We don't say well this is them only doing Workplace Core Skills.'

She found it difficult to estimate the amount of time devoted to support and guidance for candidates on Workplace Core Skills: 'I wouldn't like to say as it is integrated it would be difficult.' Because of the creative ways in which this centre integrates work and weaves evidence into the SVQ portfolio, the respondent does not think that the Workplace Core Skills component slows down the completion of the vocational awards overall. This centre did not used to integrate work so fully but have now revised their practice and altered the approach they use. She explained, 'they are integrated so it is all combined. We did find it a problem before they were integrated as it would be "you have finished your VQ now here is your Workplace Core Skills" which was stupid.' She continued, Workplace Core Skills 'are all mapped by our lead industry body so you can say where you are likely to get that evidence for these Workplace Core Skills. Ours are all integrated.' She felt that enough time is devoted to the delivery of Workplace Core Skills in the context of the SVQ in the Hairdressing industry. She does not think of Workplace Core Skills as a 'separate entity — I think of them as a full thing'. Corresponding to this impetus to integrate Workplace Core Skills in every aspect of their work, the respondent indicated that team teaching was very much part of the delivery of the VQ: 'Workplace Core Skills are integrated here and so we probably are too in our approach to teaching'.

When asked to estimate how much time she spends on the delivery of Workplace Core Skills, the respondent indicated, 'I don't know, because they are at level 3 and Working with Others, you don't have to teach them how to Problem Solve or Work with Others or Communicate because they have got to a certain level anyway. They have been through level 2 and got to level 3 so you don't have to deliver, the only one is Information Technology if they don't have computers in the salon which doesn't take a lot of time as it is basic stuff anyway the Numeracy is simple as well as it is Access 3 so you don't really have to teach them. The only thing you might have to do is give them a bit of guidance with the recording of their evidence.'

Staff delivering Workplace Core Skills at this centre use the following resources: the *Guide to Assessing Workplace Core Skills (SQA)* and exemplar materials within this, and awarding body packs, which the respondent felt were 'useful as a starter point to see what was needed'. Locally-devised resources are produced by vocational specialists. She explained that 'we have our own learning packs not covering Workplace Core Skills but listing stuff like Information Technology but it's not signposted that this is a Workplace Core Skill'. The External Verifier from the awarding body has approved these resources. Staff at this centre also encourage candidates to access hairdressing websites. They are being increasingly used by them. Although this is not directly linked to Workplace Core Skills, the respondent explained that IT skills were

embedded in the process of searching for information on the World Wide Web.

The assessment method most frequently used by this centre is observation linked to the SVQ and naturally-occurring evidence is woven through each candidate's portfolio. The respondent supplied various examples of the ways in which this centre provides opportunities to gather evidence for Workplace Core Skills throughout the candidate's portfolio. These include: 'if they are doing Problem Solving they usually do problem solving when they are doing colour corrections. Working with Others they do every single day as they are working in a team. Communication is confirmed when they are consulting with clients and have to write down a record of this communication'.

Consistency of standard is ensured through sampling candidate work as part of the internal verification process.

This centre does not offer candidates any opportunities for progression. The respondent explained, 'we don't offer any. We don't go any higher with these Workplace Core Skills. We would maybe like to, but I don't know about the candidates.' This final qualifying remark reflects the difficulties the respondent had in motivating candidates about Workplace Core Skills. She explained, 'they are not academically minded anyway. We try not to say that these are Workplace Core Skills. For example, the Numeracy, they say why do we have to do this? The Working with Others, Problem Solving and Communication we don't seem to have a problem with. Some have difficulty with the Information Technology as they don't have access it in their own workplace so we have to provide it here.' However this difficulty in motivating candidates about Workplace Core Skills does not result in difficulties in retaining candidates at this centre. Despite commenting on the low level required of candidates in Workplace Core Skills assessments, the respondent felt that the level of Workplace Core Skills candidates needed to achieve the award is appropriate for her industry. She explained that 'because they are not academic there is no need for them to achieve at a higher level. It is a creative field that they are working in'.

The respondent has yet to encounter a candidate performing at a level below that required but she feels sure that their needs would be identified at an early stage in their training and that they would be supported to bring them up to this level. She explains, 'they would have their sales test and see if there were any particular needs that they had and we would try to help them reach that standard required'.

For those candidates who fall short of the required standard for Workplace Core Skills assessments, this centre provides candidates with opportunities for reassessment.

The respondent considers that the main purpose of Workplace Core Skills is that 'it is something you have to get through to get them through

their MA'. She did not feel that Workplace Core Skills are an integral component of Modern Apprenticeships, explaining that 'if they were removed I don't think it would make any difference because the people that are doing these things anyway — they have to do it whether you assess it or not. It is in the VQ anyway'. She did not think that current funding mechanisms influence the way in which Workplace Core Skills are delivered to and received by candidates. Her explanation was that 'we don't have any milestones with Workplace Core Skills - they just have to have them. With the VQ there are milestones so much has to be done by a certain point but the Workplace Core Skills have to be completed before they can get their MA so our milestones don't include the Workplace Core Skills'. She feels that enough time is devoted to the assessment of Workplace Core Skills. She also indicated that there were no separate delivery and assessment sessions on Workplace Core Skills in the centre she represented.

The respondent found these awarding body packs to be useful as a starting point and for exemplar materials.

This respondent had a subject-based qualification and an Assessor award to demonstrate competence for Workplace Core Skills delivery and assessment.

When the respondent first began delivering and assessing Workplace Core Skills, she did not feel that she received all the support that she required. She explained, 'I don't think at the time I was. It was a case of you were given the stuff and there you are, you were phoning people up and asking questions'. The awarding body offered her initial advice on Workplace Core Skills. They 'handed [me] the stuff and told [me] to go away and develop it. But if you didn't have the assessing guidance you wouldn't be able to do anything'.

The respondent commented that very little, if any support, has been offered by the awarding body since the inception of Workplace Core Skills. She indicated that 'we can get specific training from the awarding body but, off the top of my head, I can't think the last time they had anything about Workplace Core Skills. They have other things but I don't recall anything on Workplace Core Skills recently'.

She continued, 'I think it is fair to say Workplace Core Skills have been going that long that you just go along with them maybe there is more external support but it just seems to be the same thing for so long there doesn't seem to be an awful lot of changes whereas the NVQ change and the Workplace Core Skills seem to be the same for ages'. Her suggestion is that Workplace Core Skills be revisited, revised and better supported in future so that they are keeping skills up-to-date so that they are responsive to the needs of the industry and employers. She comments, 'I think they should change them, they should revisit them and see if they are still appropriate'. She continued, 'the Workplace Core Skills need to be revisited and looked to see if there is any point in assessing these

skills as a separate entity for the Hairdressing industry as I can only comment on that'. If Workplace Core Skills courses are not changing, they will have limited transfer and are unlikely to meet the changing demands of employers.

The respondent indicated there are many opportunities within her workplace to reflect on practice. The External Verifier provides assessors with feedback on their delivery and assessment of Workplace Core Skills to ensure high quality of delivery and consistency in assessment standards.

In the course of the interview, she made interesting comparisons between Workplace Core Skills and its English counterpart, Key Skills. She feels that the Key Skills course is superior to the Workplace Core Skills course in preparing candidates at the appropriate level for entering the hairdressing industry and is better designed to fit the Vocational Qualification. She explained, 'NVQs in Hairdressing have obviously been designed for Key Skills which are a higher level than Workplace Core Skills but again you just have to look at them to see that the NVQ has been adapted even more in the kind of questions they are asking as they have been asked as Key Skills so that is probably why they are all there anyway in our NVQ in Hairdressing and why we are doing them separately. I think it has reached that level and I think that's why I think if we could look at them, delivery and assessment would improve'.

### **Areas of best practice**

This representative of this centre believes that team teaching is effective and is an example of good practice and she and her colleagues have considered collaborating with other employers and training organisations to provide assessment and training.

Time is protected in this centre for the development of in-house resources to support Workplace Core Skills candidates, to enhance their learning experience and to ensure that candidates are provided with up-to-date and relevant information on their industry.

## **Case Study 6**

This medium-sized centre based in Glasgow, with a new, smaller base in Dundee, has various strands to their operations. In addition to Modern Apprenticeships and Personal and Social Development (PSD) work, the centre is involved in training for 'Get Ready for Work', 'Gateway' and 'New Deal' programmes. At any one time they may have 1,000 candidates training with them, although not all are doing Modern Apprenticeships or, indeed, Workplace Core Skills.

The centre has approximately 20 assessors, all of whom are deemed 'competent' in the delivery and assessment of Workplace Core Skills. Delivery and assessment takes place in the candidates' place of work in the majority of cases.

The centre offers a wide range of Modern Apprenticeships including: Hospitality, Early Years Care and Education, Health and Social Care, Pharmacy Technicians and Retail. Nearly all the Workplace Core Skills are certificated at Intermediate 1. The awarding bodies used for certification of these Modern Apprenticeships are either City & Guilds or EAL. Many of the MA frameworks on offer have the Workplace Core Skills embedded but, for those that don't, the SQA Workplace Core Skills Packs are used as the basis for the assessment of the Core Skills elements.

From the discussions it was clear that the centre were aware of, and did use, APCL although one respondent felt that 'sometimes it's not appropriate — there are specific requirements to the MA and that's why we don't use APL'. When initially assessing APCL the centre would usually refer to the SQA Navigator's Report (online) or the candidates' Scottish Qualifications Certificate (SQC), if they have it, in order to identify candidates' prior achievement. In addition, they were aware of the timescale considerations in using prior achievement and that, generally, for anyone over the age of 25 'they really have to do all the Core Skills'.

The centre was not, however, using APEL as a method of accrediting prior achievement/learning. One respondent felt that the candidates 'may have it on paper but have been too long out of the workplace' and that 'if it was like for like, it would be okay'. The general feeling was that as they are work-based 'taking a work-based route for Core Skills is a more appropriate course of action'. Further, 'it gives them another certificate'.

The centre devises an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) for each candidate at the induction stage (within the first two weeks), with Workplace Core Skills incorporated into it. This is updated 'as and when required as we go on'. For those MAs where the Core Skill is not embedded, the Workplace Core Skills delivery is 'end-loaded instead of incorporating it through'. At this stage 'some of the candidates do not see the need for it' and they tend to be 'on a high' after completing their Vocational Qualification (VQ) and then 'we're telling them they still have to complete the Workplace Core Skills'. This can cause difficulty in motivating and retaining some of the candidates.

In terms of delivery of Workplace Core Skills, the centre spent half a day on each Unit and feel that this is sufficient time. The SQA Workplace Core Skills packs are adapted accordingly to make it relevant to the VQ and the Core Skills Units are placed in a separate folder from the main VQ portfolio. The design of any locally-generated resources is a team

effort through the centre's standardisation meetings where they also share best practice with each other.

The one Workplace Core Skills Unit that the centre find quite difficult to deliver is Information Technology (IT). This is mainly to do with logistics, as some companies don't have IT facilities, making it difficult to observe and access. The centre has recently addressed this problem, however, by taking a laptop with them when they are visiting the candidate in their place of work. If appropriate and necessary, the centre may occasionally bring a small group of candidates in-house to work on the IT Workplace Core Skill.

The centre uses no form of diagnostic assessment for the candidates, placing all candidates on the level of Core Skills 'laid down' within the MA framework. There are no opportunities for progression nor are there any contingencies in place for those candidates who may be operating at a level below that required for their chosen MA. One respondent felt that, in this case, 'we wouldn't be able to certificate them'.

In terms of the time spent on assessment of the Workplace Core Skills, the centre spent half a day on IT but more than three days on each of the others, adopting 'an holistic approach' throughout.

The main methods of assessment were through the adapted SQA Workplace Core Skills packs and observation. However, no provision had been made, or resources produced, for candidates who may need re-assessment. This was explained thus: 'we wouldn't get them to do the Core Skill until we were confident that they were competent in actually doing it, so we have never had the need to reassess'. For those MA frameworks where the Workplace Core Skills are not embedded, the SQA exemplar packs are used. These have been adapted slightly to make them more relevant to the particular VQ. Again, this adaptation has only been produced for the level of Core Skill required within the particular MA framework.

The centre engaged in quite extensive informal staff development though their regular standardisation meetings. These proved to be a valuable resource for all concerned in terms of exchanging ideas and best practice, and were particularly useful for new members of staff. Interestingly, there was also cross-fertilisation of ideas from the different awarding bodies. All of which provided a 'good support network throughout'.

All staff are professionally qualified in their vocational area and are 'occupationally competent in their field'. All have assessor awards (either D32/33 or the more recent A/V awards). The centre has a 'CPD programme in place' and, if any staff are having difficulty with anything 'they can approach us and [training] will be arranged'. None of those interviewed had any specific qualifications in relation to Core Skills and the feeling was that this was replicated throughout the assessors.

## Areas of best practice

It would appear that the centre has a very good support network for assessors and the cross fertilisation of ideas/views within the different awarding bodies is excellent. The set up of having regular standardisation meetings allows everyone to be involved and offers support on a much more informal basis.

In getting round the problem of some companies having no IT facilities, the centre has provided an excellent solution in taking the laptops to the candidates in their place of work. This demonstrates a good level of understanding of the difficulty sometimes experienced by candidates and in ways to overcome them.

Through the induction pack given to each new candidate, the centre makes it very clear to each that they have roles and responsibilities in relation to their award — it is ‘their award’. This is reinforced throughout the candidates’ training thus ensuring they take as much responsibility for their own training as possible.

Interestingly, as a result of the interviews, the centre now plans to ‘integrate as much as possible’ in relation to Workplace Core Skills as it ‘makes much better sense to get the evidence while you’re doing it’. Now that there are three awarding bodies used within the centre (City and Guilds, EMTA Awards Limited and SQA), they are now looking to ‘standardise’ much more as a result of the questions that have been put to them and the thought processes that this has helped to clarify.

The centre did feel that they could explain a bit more about Workplace Core Skills at the induction stage for candidates, that they ‘should make it clear that this is something that is going to have to be done’.

# 9 The Workplace Core Skills curriculum

## Overview

This section will provide a closer and more finely grained account of the delivery of the Workplace Core Skills curriculum. It will be largely descriptive of practice at a micro level, and reflect both teachers' and candidates' accounts of learning the Workplace Core Skills curriculum.

Ideally, it would have been valuable to have gathered evidence on the teaching of the Workplace Core Skills curriculum through the observation of teaching practice. However, this was not possible due to the infrequent teaching periods arranged for Workplace Core Skills candidates and the general low level of timetabled teaching hours associated with the delivery of the awards. It has been possible, however, to gather data on the delivery of the Workplace Core Skills curriculum through the interviewing of teachers, focus groups with candidates and the collection and analysis of teaching materials used on Workplace Core Skills courses.

The section will also examine the use of the awarding body's assessment and curriculum packs by the providers. This invariably meant the SQA packs, but also included materials developed by Institute of the Motor Industry.

## Curriculum

As described in Section 6, the majority of candidates are studying at Access 3 and Intermediate 1 Workplace Core Skills. This reflects the link with and growth in Modern Apprenticeships in Scotland. The MAs used are quite diverse, covering traditional apprenticeship industries and new service-based industries. Normally, the level of Workplace Core Skills to be covered is stipulated within the particular Modern Apprenticeship framework. However, not all Modern Apprenticeship frameworks require the Workplace Core Skills to be certificated separately.

The Workplace Core Skills delivery that was examined tended to fall into two categories:

- ◆ discrete subject Units
- ◆ integrated provision within the MAs

There were three examples of providers which offered the discrete provision of Workplace Core Skills. The first a 'Ready for Work' course, the second a life-skills programme and the third a basic skills curriculum

to support a general training course. All of the other providers offered integrated provision within a Modern Apprenticeship framework.

Within the Modern Apprenticeship group of providers, Workplace Core Skills subjects were taught differently according to the subject area:

Information Technology	Integrated (explicit)
Communication	Integrated (explicit)
Problem Solving	Embedded (implicit)
Working with Others	Embedded (implicit)
Numeracy	Discrete (explicit)

Numeracy was more often taught explicitly, as a discrete Unit and related to the occupational area. IT and Communication were more frequently taught in an integrated manner within the Modern Apprenticeship scheme. This was often made explicit towards the end of the MA when Workplace Core Skills were ‘bolted-on’ to the end of the evidence-gathering process for the portfolio. Problem Solving and Working with Others were frequently assumed to be embedded within actual workplace practices and could be evidenced implicitly by identifying these workplace activities. For instance:

‘Yes, in the workplace where possible... especially the working with others and the problem solving... not the IT and Numeracy... it’s not possible... they would come into college to do that’.

In Section 6 it we see that very little time is actually spent on the teaching of Workplace Core Skills. Although there is significant missing data from the analysis of the aggregate data, it nevertheless, can be seen that the majority of providers spent less than one day on teaching Workplace Core Skills. A minority spent over three days and a significant number could not estimate the actual time spent on teaching as opposed to assessment. Those that did teach for more than one day were more likely to be offering ‘stand-alone’ Workplace Core Skills, with Numeracy and IT being the Workplace Core Skills with a stronger discrete teaching component.

## The Teaching of Workplace Core Skills

### Case Study (1) discrete delivery of Workplace Core Skills

<b>Programme</b>	Induction Workplace Core Skills
<b>Length</b>	One week
<b>Workplace Core Skills</b>	All
<b>Specific Skills</b>	Prepare and present presentation, produce

	graphs, histograms, calculate percentages, spreadsheets, deal with customer complaint and teamwork simulation
<b>Teachers</b>	Vocational instructors/assessors

This is an example of an actual taught course. The candidates attended on an ‘off-the-job’ basis and participated in team and individual learning activities. The Workplace Core Skill level was at Access 3 and Intermediate 1 and the induction was linked to a particular occupational context.

Another provider (stand-alone) describes very clearly the amount of time devoted to the teaching of Workplace Core Skills:

‘Problem solving and working with others would normally be done in the workshop area ... IT is normally done differently ... they would normally get about 10 hours ... Just because most of them are more interested in IT and its easier to get them in ... and the other things is when they come in every one of them do job search activities on a Friday so they are using a computer and getting support and guidance on IT every Friday ... so on a Friday it is four hours straight away as they are on it all morning ... The Literacy and Numeracy I would say, it’s tricky as they’ve not been spending as much time on it as they should have but I would say on average three to four on a weekly basis’ .

This provider is also clear about the need for discrete delivery, although in this case the word discrete may be interpreted differently:

‘As far as the core skills go ... all the clients are treated the same ... if they come in, I suppose I would act discretely in the sense if someone needed help with their reading and writing and numbers and the younger ones wouldn’t want others to know ... so if maybe in the group that where in the workshop ... maybe there would be four of them, the four would be taken out and brought into the training room session but nobody would necessarily need to know why they were taken away’.

## Case Study (2) integrated delivery of Workplace Core Skills

<b>Programme</b>	CD-ROMs Self Study
<b>Length</b>	No specified time
<b>Workplace Core Skills</b>	All
<b>Specific Skills</b>	Producing a training CD, organise a visa for an overseas trip, preparing a budget for a brochure,

	completed the European Computer Driver Licence (ECDL) course, adapted SQA pack for an exercise on numeracy.
<b>Teachers</b>	Trainer/assessor offering support

This is an example of a self-study pack used to support the collection of evidence for a Workplace Core Skills portfolio. There was no actual taught component to the work. The skills involved are particularly specific to the organisation. Other examples from providers were workbooks on numeracy and IT research activities based again on self-study. According to one provider:

‘other than that ... it will happen out in the placement ... where the candidate will be advised at some point that we will be looking to cover this at a later date and we will be looking for a situation where they have a problem and they have to work their way through that resolving it working with other people ... or we are looking at a situation where they are working with others, maybe a customer complaint has come up that they have not been able to deal with but that involves outside contact as well as internal contact’.

### **Case Study (3) embedded delivery of Workplace Core Skills**

<b>Programme</b>	Workplace Core Skills
<b>Length</b>	No time allocated
<b>Workplace Core Skills</b>	All
<b>Specific Skills</b>	IT
<b>Teachers</b>	None (assessor)

This is the minimal teaching model for delivering Workplace Core Skills. It involves an assessment-led approach to gathering evidence for the Modern Apprenticeship. It is better described by one of the providers:

‘For everything it will be very minimal, it will become part of the on-going assessment and planning stage so we agree what we are going to do, how we are going to do it, when we are going to do it and then we would come back and have the core skills built into what we are doing so the candidate doesn’t see it as that... the only time that is different is when we are doing the IT... the candidate will be explained... you are coming in here for a day’s course’

and

‘I would be very upset if one of my team was saying to them look we are going to look at core skills... it doesn’t come into the conversation at all... what happens is we are looking for evidence to cover this particular task and this is what you need to do in the assessors mind... they are looking at the bits and pieces which will marry both standards together for the qualification and the core skills and that is the way it is presented to the candidate so they don’t know what is happening and we do it automatically so we are not thinking about it’.

Providers tended to be spread across these three types of groups. The majority were within the case study 2 and 3 types. These were mainly private training providers. Type 1 providers tended to be colleges and employers, although there was one particular good example from a private training provider of this model of teaching.

## **Contextualising Workplace Core Skills**

It is now time to look closely at the actual learning activities used by the teachers when designing specific Workplace Core Skills tasks. Although respondents to the questionnaires believed that they were developing generic transferable skills, in practice all the examples used were context-dependent within particular organisations and occupations. For instance, according to one provider:

‘It is also life skills — using the work place to gather information. I’m working with childcare, motor vehicle students and we have tried to use the Core Skills in a contextualised format in the workplace’.

This often meant the instructor/assessor having expert knowledge of a particular work-based practice:

‘A bit more tricky area ... we do have a case study where the candidate has to plan a swimming trip and has to work out how much ratios and costs etc but we also have a stand-alone pack with calculating percentages etc ... we would ask them to monitor the temperature of a baby, relate it to their practice’.

There were very few examples of general or abstract notions of skills. On every occasion the task was linked to the candidates’ workplace experience:

‘For IT we ask the candidate to use the nursery world website which is appropriate to the qualification that they are doing and as part of the IT the finding information section we ask

the candidate to go to the nursery world and find things of interest to their work.’

This often meant thinking through the exact nature of the candidates’ day to day work role and helping them extract ‘meaning’ associations with the Workplace Core Skill elements:

‘I would be discussing, reading and identifying particular projects they are involved in ... an example of that is I have a candidate just now who works for the council and they have just developed the ‘kerb side collection’ you know the green bins and the problems they are having with the whole project, the complaints the missed deliveries and she is having to do an awful lot of problem-solving and an awful lot of team working so that is the project she is going to base her whole thing on and its is also mapped through a VQ as part of her core evidence. It is helping them identify what is really going on because that alone then gives them the confidence to say ‘well maybe this will work’.

There were lots of examples of this contextualisation of Workplace Core Skills. For instance: calculating heat loss from a radiator; writing a child development record; computer register of children’s attendance; calculating hair colour correction or computer fault finding on cars.

This contextualisation process is a central component of the design of delivery of Workplace Core Skills. It is by placing the skill within a context that helps to give it its meaning.

## **Awarding body packs**

As indicated in Section 6, providers tended to use a range of support materials for delivering and assessing Workplace Core Skills. The following were the most popular:

- ◆ SQA guidelines on assessing Workplace Core Skills
- ◆ awarding body packs
- ◆ locally-generated resources
- ◆ website materials
- ◆ other

Often providers would adapt the awarding body’s pack to meet local circumstances (often referred to as a ‘good start’):

‘but I would use the basis with what is provided from SQA and I adapt it’

and

‘What I tend to do is the exemplars that are there ... I try and contextualise them, convert them ... so for example if it was a sports centre receptionist then I would use my IT one ... to list members of the club’.

The majority of these locally-generated assessment materials (67%) were subsequently approved by the respective awarding body through the external verification visit:

‘Yes, own pack that we have designed ourselves with looking at the standards and integrating it into what we are delivering’.

According to one provider:

‘Yes, very useful, it was the bible to begin with (SQA assessment guide)’.

Again, another example of the usefulness of the guide to assessment:

‘Everything is useful. The information for candidates is excellent ... it’s not too much ... it gives them enough to know without possibly frightening them off. The information for assessors is good ... the strategies etc and the exemplar stuff’.

Providers also tended to use a range of resources and adapt them for particular awarding bodies:

‘There are resources within the building on everything, job search skills and use Axis education, I used it a lot for the older clients, which can work towards the vocational construction, numeracy, communications and things.. and they have just introduced that pack but I discovered it by accident on a website and I find their stuff great ... it is all consistent, it is easy to use, easy to understand and they do it at various levels. It works well in conjunction with City and Guilds qualifications that we deliver as well, although it can be adapted and used for SQA’.

However, there was the occasional dissenter to this general positive tone about the awarding body packs:

‘I would say ‘not useful’ simply because what we will look at is the standard of the VQ the candidate is working to and look at how we can encourage the candidate to generate the extra evidence that is required to meet both standards and I don’t think they work together. One is going down one route and the other down this route we are more keen at getting the

candidates to generate evidence meet the VQ content but at the same time aware the Xs that are needed for the core skills’

It is clear that the most effective way to use the Guide to Assessment and the awarding body packs was to adapt them for use and contextualise them to the particular occupation. They were not considered by the majority of providers to be ‘tools of assessment’ that required to be used in a reliable and consistent manner but rather as a starting point for further development. This flexibility was a particular strength of the supporting material.

# 10 Focus Groups with Workplace Core Skills Candidates

## Overview

In January 2006, following the interviews with Workplace Core Skills trainers/assessors, two members of the research team visited two private sector centres to conduct focus group discussions with Workplace Core Skills candidates. The Focus Group Framework devised by the researchers can be found in Appendix 3 at the end of this report. The organisations represented were employers and private trainers. The former was a large centre based in Glasgow while the latter was a medium-sized centre based in Aberdeen.

In Focus Group One, 11 candidates participated, six enrolled on Workplace Core Skills courses and five enrolled on Key Skills courses. All participants were male and under 25 years of age. The candidates were enrolled on a variety of courses, including SVQ level 3 Domestic Natural Gas Installation and SVQ level 2 Domestic Natural Gas Installation and Maintenance. All five Workplace Core Skills were assessed at Intermediate 1, although the current framework only required Numeracy to be assessed at Access 3.

In Focus Group Two, four candidates participated. All participants were female, over 25 years of age and were enrolled on the SVQ Business Administration course, required to achieve Intermediate 1 level in all Core Skills courses with the exception of Numeracy, which was to be achieved at Access 3 level. They worked on Numeracy as a discrete Unit while for the other Workplace Core Skills evidence was woven through the SVQ portfolio.

## Knowledge, understanding and awareness of Workplace Core Skills curriculum areas

Candidates were not immediately able to identify the five Workplace Core Skills curriculum areas. They could, however, describe the various activities in which they had been involved and were able to provide further explanation of the tasks they had completed. When the interviewers prompted them, they did seem to recognise the different curriculum areas although unable to identify them initially.

## **Knowledge, understanding and awareness of Workplace Core Skills assessment levels**

Candidates in both centres were unclear and seemed confused about the levels attainable in Workplace Core Skills and showed little awareness of opportunities for progression. Some candidates were able to identify some of the levels, very often the ones they were working towards, but many were unsure of the names assigned to each level.

## **Experience of Core Skills from school**

In Focus Group One, where all focus group participants were under 25 years old, there was some uncertainty and confusion surrounding their recollections of Core Skills from school. One Workplace Core Skills candidate had a vague recollection of doing Core Skills in fifth year at school (Communications where he had to write a letter for the written assessment) in preparation for Higher English in sixth year while a Key Skills candidate indicated he had completed Key Skills ie Numeracy and Information Technology as part of his GCSE course.

In Focus Group Two, none of the candidates involved in the discussion were below the age of 25 so had no previous experience of Core Skills from school.

## **Knowledge and Awareness of Core Skills Profiles**

Candidates did not know what a Core Skills Profile was. In Focus Group One, once the researchers explained what a Core Skills Profile was, some recognised that they had these qualifications on certificates from school. They did, however, think these were listed as modules or Units at the front of their certificate rather than within the Core Skills Profile section at the back of the Scottish Qualifications Certificate (SQC). In Focus Group Two, none of the candidates had a Core Skills Profile and did not know what a Core Skills Profile was.

## **Attendance on Workplace Core Skills taught courses as part of Modern Apprenticeships and an overview of the topics covered**

In Focus Group One, candidates were given a one-week intensive induction specifically on Workplace Core Skills. During this week, some delivery took place on each Workplace Core Skill and the candidates began producing the evidence required for assessment. This process of

gathering evidence was then continued throughout their training. For Communication, candidates were required to prepare and deliver a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation directly related to their workplace. Candidates were able to choose their presentation topic for the first presentation 'dry run' and then for the summative assessment chose a more vocational topic. For Numeracy, candidates were given workbooks and were required to draw line graphs, histograms, calculate percentages, surface areas etc. Researchers saw evidence of this from a pack volunteered by one of the candidates. Where possible, candidates were given working examples of applied numeracy in the workplace context. For Information Technology, candidates were required to prepare spreadsheets. Information Technology and Communication Workplace Core Skills were assessed in an integrated way during the Microsoft PowerPoint presentation task. For Problem Solving, candidates were required to write and reply to a customer complaint letter linked to their workplace. Having been initially unsure about whether they had completed the Working with Others Workplace Core Skill, candidates were aware that they had been involved in teamwork tasks and assessments. In a simulated exercise, each group member was set a task and allocated a role within the team. They were assessed on their performance and contribution to the team accordingly.

In Focus Group Two, the Workplace Core Skills of candidates were not developed through taught sessions. Instead they worked through CD-ROMs and gathered evidence for their portfolios individually, with support from their trainer/assessor. All candidates involved in the focus group discussion indicated they were 'quite far on with the modules' and that they were 'finishing the CD'. Each of the candidates gave examples of the creative ways in which naturally-occurring evidence from their workplaces is integrated into their assessment for Workplace Core Skill.

In reference to the Communications area, one candidate explained that:

'For Communications we've got: dealing with customers, sending e-mails to customers, dealing with problems, turning into a positive situation and then also another example of it [ . . . ] letter, email, fax, witness statement. We've got things like I've got here, some things we'd to organise within the company so we were working with restaurants and various other people in the company [ . . . ] evidence in the form of e-mails and replies'.

For Working with Others, evidence was provided of organisational tasks conducted within the company such as producing a training CD for work instructions which arose from an initial problem identified and resolved by one of the candidates. This candidate indicated that she:

'Wrote work instructions on a CD where I downloaded the course material onto the CD and work instructions and I've got a witness statement to the person who was on the course

just to say that I'd delivered the course, so that was like a Problem Solving — A Working with Others'.

For Problem Solving one candidate:

'Had to organise a visa for my boss to go to Iran so I had to be in touch with the Embassy in London to organise that and get the passport and consent letter from my company sent down there so that it was all in place for her going'.

The candidate explained that arranging the Iran visa threw up many problems that had to be resolved and developed her skills in these areas.

Another candidate provided evidence of her problem solving capabilities by devising a department budget brochure and discussing income and expenditure. She explained that this involved:

'Pulling together the department's budget to produce this brochure so that we could see where we got the idea of the money we were spending. [ . . . ] There was a figure given but we had to work out where that figure came from and [identify how] we were spending the money so there was a lot of work in this on Problem Solving'.

For Information Technology, three out of the four candidates who participated in the focus group discussion had completed the European Computer Driver Licence (ECDL) course. One of the candidates explained:

'We used the ECDL CD with all the different Office software packages, SAP [Systems, Applications and Products company program] for timesheets, requisitions, Excel, PowerPoint'.

For Numeracy, candidates were simply using the SQA Core Skills Numeracy pack which the trainer had adapted slightly for candidates.

## **Acquiring new knowledge and information through Workplace Core Skills**

In Focus Group One, candidates seemed to enjoy and benefited from the Information Technology curriculum area of Workplace Core Skills, particularly in areas such as spreadsheets and Microsoft PowerPoint. Indeed prior to their Workplace Core Skills training, some had never compiled a PowerPoint presentation. They also commented that the Numeracy Workplace Core Skill was very like work they had done at school but the exercises offered during this course were deemed to be a bit more useful since they were applied and context-specific rather than

theoretical and abstract. In general, candidates felt that the Workplace Core Skills course was a good refresher for work they had done at school but also gave them the opportunity to acquire new skills in Information Technology related areas.

In Focus Group Two, candidates also highlighted the benefits of the Information Technology Workplace Core Skill and integrated Communications work. Candidates at this centre were particularly enthusiastic about the European Computer Driving Licence software enabling them to extend and deepen their knowledge of Microsoft Word and other Office packages. One candidate remarked:

‘Everything that is in here is part of my job but it makes you question things and the way that you do them [...] it makes you look for areas you can improve on’.

Candidates particularly welcomed opportunities to acquire new skills, to hone existing ones and to reflect on professional practice and recognise the value of Workplace Core Skills in helping them develop in their roles within companies.

## **Candidate perceptions of assessment procedures for Workplace Core Skills**

In Focus Group One, candidates were assessed on their Workplace Core Skills at the end of their Modern Apprenticeship. One candidate explained that:

‘Workplace Core Skills are assessed at the end of each section, they [ie the assessors] would make sure it was up to scratch before they’d let you move onto the next section’.

The assessor tells the candidates what is required of them. They are not given formal feedback on how they are performing as they complete tasks until the end of the course but are confident that if they were not meeting the necessary standard, their assessor would mention this to them so that the necessary action can be taken before assessment.

In Focus Group Two, only Numeracy had been assessed at the required level (Access 3) by their trainer. For the other four Workplace Core Skills Units, candidates’ evidence is assessed at the required level (Intermediate 1) at the end of the course. All of the evidence candidates provide is integrated, being woven through their portfolios. One candidate explained:

‘We are asked to produce examples so you have them in work anyway so it was just a case of (speaking for myself) printing off an extra one [ie copy] of what you were already doing’.

They are, however, given no indication of their achievement during the Workplace Core Skills element of their course and rely on the trainer to advise them of whether the evidence they provide is of the required standard.

## **Candidates' perceptions of the usefulness of Workplace Core Skills teaching and assessment and their motivation**

In Focus Group One, candidates regarded Workplace Core Skills teaching and assessment as 'generally useful and quite relevant to what we were doing', regarding the course as 'a refresher'. There was general consensus that Workplace Core Skills were 'good for your CV' and future employability. They felt that the one-week induction course was useful in helping them get started with Workplace Core Skills and then they were left to complete tasks themselves with support if required from assessors/trainers. The Microsoft PowerPoint presentation task took the longest amount of time to complete, approximately two days, because of the research, design and compilation involved. Candidates indicated they were allowed two attempts in being assessed as satisfactorily completing their tasks at the required level. Presentations were recorded on video and constructive feedback given by their peers and by the assessor. Some indicated that they were working on an Information Technology task which required them to use the internet to search for mechanical parts and that they will be asked to conduct a general internet search to find information on a subject which may not be directly related to their workplace context as part of their assessment for this Workplace Core Skills area. Some expressed a desire to achieve Workplace Core Skills at a higher level than they were currently working towards, especially if their roles within the company changed eg if they were required to deliver more presentations than their current role demanded.

The majority of Workplace Core Skills candidates in Focus Group One were motivated recognising that 'we had to do it [ie Workplace Core Skills] to pass the course [ie the Modern Apprenticeship].' One candidate expanded on this indicating that, 'you have to be motivated or you're not going to get the grade to pass the course'. Another candidate felt that his experience of Core Skills in the workplace context motivated him more than in the school context: 'when I was in school I didn't really pay much attention but it's the fact that you're a wee bit older and wiser'.

At the time the discussion took place, candidates in Focus Group Two indicated that they had not experienced much assessment yet but remarked that it really was a matter of producing the evidence from what they were doing in their job already. Although indicating that they were happy with the assessment levels required of them, candidates did intimate that they found Numeracy at Access 3 to be too easy.

Up until this point, the candidates had not reflected on their motivation for Workplace Core Skills. One, speaking on behalf of the group, indicated, 'we haven't really thought about it, you just do it. It's just in you.' For one of her colleagues, however, the experience of Workplace Core Skills definitely motivated her. She explained, 'for me everything that's in here is part of my job anyway and I know my job but what it does do it actually sort of questions the way that you do things and this is a better way to do them and in fact makes you look at each module where you have to do an exercise, you would actually look into it, see if there's areas you can improve on and so it does help, it encourages you'. Candidates participating in Focus Group Two were very enthusiastic about the usefulness of Workplace Core Skills. One commented that the course allowed them to hone 'skills which we haven't used very much and it's taught us more about it'. Another commented that, 'I learned some software on the CD-ROM that I didn't know how to use before'. So Workplace Core Skills were deemed to be beneficial to this cohort.

## **Issues raised and suggestions offered by candidates regarding Workplace Core Skills**

In Focus Group One, one candidate recommended that the level of difficulty of the course be increased for future candidates: 'make it harder ... for new trainees'. This was initially put forward as a flippant remark but the researchers believed that this candidate was actually making a serious suggestion worthy of note. His colleagues also indicated that they did not feel challenged by the level they were required to attain stating, 'it was quite a lot of general knowledge'. In the Information Technology area especially, some candidates felt they would have benefited from a more in-depth approach being applied ie more time devoted to developing skill in spreadsheets etc. However, they did acknowledge that in all areas, trainers/assessors encouraged them to operate at a higher level and expected high standards (although they weren't being certificated at a higher level than the minimum required).

At the end of the focus group discussion, the interviewers spent time looking at one Workplace Core Skills evidence folder offered by one of the candidates. From this evidence-base, it was clear that this candidate was operating at a level beyond Intermediate 1 for some Workplace Core Skills areas. This raises the question in the researchers' minds as to why candidates are not being certificated at a higher level ie above Intermediate 1. The general feeling of the group was that the Workplace Core Skills level they were currently working towards (Intermediate 1) did not really stretch them although they did say that the assessors always tried to push them that bit further in all aspects of their training. Candidates participating in Focus Group Two also highlighted the low levels of attainment required for Workplace Core Skills as an issue. One commented, 'the Numeracy pack was really easy. I was looking at it over

and over again because I thought they can't possibly be asking you something like that because there's got to be a catch in it somewhere'.

## **Conclusions from Focus Groups**

Candidates were generally aware of the level of Workplace Core Skill that they were currently taking, but unaware of other levels and the Workplace Core Skill framework.

Generally speaking, candidates considered the Workplace Core Skills levels (Access 3 and Intermediate 1) they operated at as undemanding.

The general amount of teaching provided to candidates on Workplace Core Skills was limited but effective.

The contextualisation of the Workplace Core Skills tasks was much appreciated by candidates and helped to improve levels of confidence and motivation.

It was important to deliver an effective induction to Workplace Core Skills candidates to increase their knowledge, awareness and understanding of the curriculum, assessment levels and value of the award.

It is important to provide candidates with opportunities for progression to enable them to top up skills in a way which stimulates and challenges them and promotes their continuing professional development.

# 11 Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL) in Workplace Core Skills

## Incidence of APCL

This analysis was undertaken using SQA's APS database to obtain quantitative evidence of APCL within the centre sample.

Candidates certificated for Workplace Core Skills Units where they have already attained the relevant Core Skill was employed as a 'proxy' for APCL *not* taking place. However, the available data cannot explain 'why' APCL did not occur.

Although, around 75% of the cases in the sample suggest that APCL has taken place; where APCL has not taken place this occurs in around 90% of the centre sample.

In only three instances were candidates entered and subsequently certificated for all five Workplace Core Skills (WPCS) when they had already attained the Core Skills elsewhere. Candidates entered for one or more WPCS Units (where the candidate had already attained the Core Skills) was much more prevalent perhaps indicating that the lack of APCL was more widespread and candidates were entered for selected WPCS 'driven' by external programme Core Skill requirements.

Only certification data has been employed and given that not all candidates who are entered for the Units will actually complete then had entry data been available then this may have been more revealing.

A more detailed breakdown of the analysis is provided in the following pages.

## Methodology

### Sample

Candidates certificated for one or more Workplace Core Skills were selected from 19 of the 20 centres included in the original project centre sample. It was not possible to include all centres in the sample as one of the centres was not a SQA centre and therefore the candidates' Core Skills information was not available on the APS database.

The square root of certificated candidates in each centre was selected for investigation with a minimum number of 10 candidates selected where the square root result was less than 10. Where there were not 10

candidates at a centre all the available candidates were selected. The candidates were randomly selected which meant that there was a range of Workplace Core Skills Unit certifications across the candidates ranging one and five Units per candidate.

This resulted in an overall sample of 204 candidates across 684 individual Workplace Core Skills Unit certifications.

## APS

The ‘Candidate Core Skills’ facility on the APS database was employed to cross-reference the candidate’s Core Skill profile with Workplace Core Skill Unit certification. Where the candidate had been certificated for a Core Skill at the level or above of the respective Workplace Core Skill before the process date for the WPCS Unit then this was recorded as APCL not taking place.

For the purpose of this analysis it is assumed that the Scottish Qualifications Certificate (or online equivalent) was employed for APCL.

It was not possible from the available data to ascertain why APCL had not taken place.

## Incidence of APCL not taking place

	Number	% of Overall Sample
Candidates	52	25.5 (n=204)
Centres	17	89.5 (n=19)
WPCS Units	110	16.1 (n=684)

## Candidates

The table shows that around 25% of candidates who were entered and subsequently certificated for Workplace Core Skills had already attained the Core Skill (at the level of or above the respective WPCS Unit) through embedded or stand-alone certification.

Of the 52 candidates in the overall sample where it appeared that APCL had not taken place, there were only three instances where the candidate was certificated for all the WPCS Units. If the SQC (or online equivalent) was not being considered at all then it might be expected that this total would be much greater (excluding completion rates as a variable).

However, there were 16 instances where candidates were entered and certificated for three or four WPCS Units and 33 instances where the candidate was entered and certificated for one or two WPCS Units where they already had the respective Core Skill at the level of the WPCS Unit(s) or above. This could indicate a partial acceptance of the SQC

Core Skills profile or that the ‘driver’ for undertaking the additional WPCS Unit(s), eg a wider educational or training framework, only required certain Core Skills which the candidate was subsequently entered for through WPCS Units. If this latter point is correct then completely ignoring the SQC Core Skills Profile may be more prevalent.

## Centres

Again, based on the above table it is evident that where APCL did not take place this lack of activity occurred in 17 out of the 19 centres within the sample.

## Workplace Core Skills Units

	Incidence	% of Sample (n=111)
Problem Solving	32	28.8
Numeracy	27	24.3
Information Technology	24	21.6
Communication	17	15.3
Working with Others	11	9.0

This table suggests that there is less a tendency for candidates to be entered and reach the Core Skills of Communication and Working with Others through the WPCS Units vehicle. All the centres in the sample were approved to offer the full suite of WPCS Units therefore this has been excluded a potential contributing variable.

# 12 Conclusions

The overall aim of the research was to investigate the delivery and assessment of Workplace Core Skills for all approved awarding bodies within Scotland.

In particular to:

- ◆ evaluate the impact and relevance of the Workplace Core Skills Pack and Guidance, its impact on assessment and the consistency of assessment across awarding bodies and sectors
- ◆ investigate the recognition given to core skills through previous certification processes
- ◆ identify good practice in the delivery and assessment of workplace core skills

The study included both quantitative and qualitative research methods and was structured into three distinct phases:

- ◆ consolidation of existing literature on the delivery and assessment of Core/Key skills
- ◆ collection and analysis of quantitative data supplied by the awarding bodies
- ◆ cross-sectional case studies

There were 20 case study organisations and two pilot studies. The case studies involved undertaking 35 interviews with workplace vocational assessors, collecting teaching and assessment materials and undertaking two focus groups with candidates. The organisations represented covered private training organisations, colleges, employers and the army. The majority of the centres were private training providers.

The original research schedule included a plan to undertake ‘observations’ of teaching and assessment practices within a sample of training providers. However, the centres within the study found it difficult to arrange for the research team to observe teachers delivering Workplace Core Skills given the timescales and group sizes that were available during the period of the research study. It was, therefore, decided jointly with SQA not to proceed with this component of the project.

The overall number of Unit certifications for Workplace Core Skills over the period 2001–2005 was 59,375. This scale of activity is considerable and reflects a growth in demand for this relatively new product. In terms of delivery, the majority of Workplace Core Skills are directly linked to the Modern Apprenticeship (MAs) frameworks. MAs have also witnessed a period of major growth during this period, both within traditional sectors and, interestingly, within the new service-based sectors

of the economy. This expansion in the numbers taking MAs has also been associated with high participation rates of women in the care, retail, business administration and health-related sectors. A significant factor here is also the funding of MAs/ Workplace Core Skills by the Enterprise Companies. These changing patterns of gender participation within the MAs are also paralleled by interesting changes in age participation rates. The MA frameworks now permit relatively more mature workers to enrol on training programmes, particularly within the new service industries. This again will be reflected in the take-up and delivery of Workplace Core Skills.

The secondary data analysis outlined in Section 6 suggests that the majority of those undertaking Workplace Core Skills are doing so within the Modern Apprenticeship frameworks. The Modern Apprenticeships are offered across a wide range of occupations. In particular, the Workplace Core Skills were concentrated around Access 3 and Intermediate 1 levels within the MA programmes. The evidence from this research would suggest that this level of delivery is appropriate to the client group, given their previous experience of studying literacy and numeracy at school. This argument is supported by the literature: Core/Key Skills candidates were likely to be of mixed ability, require additional support and guidance and be de-motivated by school-based teaching methods (Unwin et al, 2000).

A relatively smaller group of candidates taking Workplace Core Skills are those participating in employability and/or life-skills training. This is interesting, as it assumes a pre-employment level of skill and allows for the Workplace Core Skills Units to be taken as ‘stand-alone’ offerings. The case study research found excellent examples of the delivery of Workplace Core Skills within the ‘Get Ready for Work’ programmes and college life-skill modules.

A positive feature of the pattern of delivery of Workplace Core Skills was the distribution of candidates by age. Although the majority of certifications were for those aged 25 and under, a significant number of those participating in Workplace Core Skills came from quite a wider range of age groups, both for males and females. This is a distinct advantage of the Workplace Core Skill portfolio, particularly for those returning to work and/or embarking on life-skills training.

From the analysis of the macro-level secondary data and the case study organisations, it was apparent that awarding bodies and training providers of Workplace Core Skills needed to be clear about their main reasons for being involved in the delivery of the awards. This research has identified three main purposes for being involved in Workplace Core Skills:

- ◆ employability
- ◆ up-grading of skills
- ◆ certification

The ‘best practice’ providers in the delivery and assessment of Workplace Core Skills were those which combined employability and/or the up-grading of skills with certification. These organisations tended to:

- ◆ use initial diagnostic tools for assessment
- ◆ formally recognise prior certificated and experiential learning
- ◆ place the candidates at the appropriate level of Workplace Core Skill according to their level of ability rather than the level identified in the MA framework
- ◆ deliver an induction course to candidates
- ◆ provide individual guidance and support
- ◆ have a clear idea of a ‘core’ curriculum planning model underpinning their teaching of Workplace Core Skills
- ◆ use integrated and continuous forms of assessment linked to the Modern Apprenticeship framework
- ◆ ‘adapt’ awarding body materials to support the learning and assessment of their candidates

This group of providers tended to offer a curriculum-led model of Workplace Core Skills that was clearly linked to employability and the up-grading of skills. Certification was then an outcome of this broader employer-based approach to Workplace Core Skills.

In contrast, those providers which concentrated mainly on the certification of Workplace Core Skills tended to:

- ◆ offer no initial diagnostic assessment of candidates
- ◆ avoid the use of prior certificated or experiential learning
- ◆ place candidates on the Modern Apprenticeship Framework level of Workplace Core Skills irrespective of their level of ability
- ◆ provide no induction programme
- ◆ offer a very limited amount of explicit teaching of Workplace Core Skills
- ◆ ‘bolt-on’ Workplace Core Skills assessment evidence to the end of the Modern Apprenticeship portfolio
- ◆ use awarding body materials as definitive tools of assessment rather than as a guide to practice

In general terms, those ‘assessment-led’ providers focussed primarily on the certification of Workplace Core Skills and tended to offer candidates few opportunities for progression within the Workplace Core Skill framework.

These conclusions outlined in Section 12 of this report identify ‘best practice’ in the delivery and assessment of Workplace Core Skills. This data is described at a ‘meta’ level of analysis and uses the ‘voices’ of the

training providers to support particular arguments. This data is illuminated in more detail in Section 8 of the report, which provides case study examples from across providers from different awarding bodies. The case studies are not in themselves intended to be exemplars of ‘best practice’ but are there to provide context-specific examples of the range of activities that can be used to effectively deliver and assess Workplace Core Skills. However, it is worth revisiting here some of the recurrent themes that emerge from the quantitative and qualitative data on the delivery and assessment of Workplace Core Skills.

There is clear evidence to support the claim in the literature that it was important to have initial screening, guidance and diagnostic assessment of Core Skills practices and for this to be included in Individual Learning Plans for students.

There was extensive data from the case studies of the use of Individual Learning Plans linked to arrangements for support and guidance. When combined with the use of initial screening processes, these systems seemed to operate very effectively.

There has been an on-going debate in the literature on how to design and deliver generic transferable skills. This normally comes down to whether the generic skills should be taught in an ‘integrated’ or ‘separate’ manner. The data from the case studies tended to reinforce some of these pedagogical dilemmas. Of the five Workplace Core Skills, it was only Numeracy that was taught as a discrete Unit. The main reason for this was that vocational trainers found it difficult to find natural occurring examples of numerical activities within particular occupations that could be used within candidates’ daily work activities. The other main Workplace Core Skills subject areas were generally delivered through integrated learning processes that, for instance, combined Communication and IT skills with routine work activities. There were a number of good examples from the curriculum-led providers of such transparent and integrated ‘learning from work’ pedagogies. However, the Workplace Core Skills of Problem Solving and Working with Others were rather more problematic. The majority of training providers tended to see them as embedded implicitly within on-going work activities. As a consequence, the Workplace Core Skills candidates received very little structured training on these topics. Overall, there was limited evidence of the systematic design and delivery of Workplace Core Skills training based upon a shared understanding of the curriculum.

An interesting aspect of the general debate on Key and Core Skills is whether the skills are genuinely generic and transferable. The universal notion of skills has recently come under critical scrutiny by many observers. In fact the latest policy documents on the education of 14–19 year olds in England have dropped the term Key Skills in favour of the notion of ‘functional’ skills. So it was interesting to elicit the views of Workplace Core Skill trainers on the intrinsic nature of the skills that they were teaching and assessing. Although the overwhelming majority

believed that Workplace Core Skills were transferable and generic in nature, in practice all their examples of such skills were context-dependent and specific to an organisation and/or occupation. This is not surprising, however, given that Workplace Core Skills are in essence both particular and partial. This, in fact, is what is valuable about them. Employers generally speaking are aware of this and will, therefore, fund these types of skills rather than the more ‘transferable’ ones. Therefore, learning numeracy by calculating heat loss from a radiator or calculating hair colour retention makes absolute sense for apprentices in gas engineering and hairdressing respectively. By giving particular ‘meanings’ to arithmetic calculations candidates can relate this to their actual work experiences and feel better motivated to complete their studies.

In terms of the delivery and assessment of Workplace Core Skills the ‘best practice’ providers tended to employ qualified instructors and teachers to design, deliver and assess Workplace Core Skills. It was not deemed sufficient by these centres for staff to have only an occupationally relevant qualification and/or assessor award. Finally, the excellent centres in the sample of case studies also tended to have a coherent ‘Continuous Professional Development’ programme for their staff that involved on-going training in pedagogic and assessment related issues linked specifically to Workplace Core Skills.

The assessors of Workplace Core Skills had a very pragmatic approach to the assessment of the Units. An integrative assessment method was used throughout that brought together Workplace Core Skills evidence with that from the Modern Apprenticeship. The ‘best practice’ centres tended to combine this integrative methodology with continuous assessment methods. In contrast, the other centres tended to leave the Workplace Core Skills assessments to the end of the Modern Apprenticeship and then ‘bolt-on’ the evidence to the portfolio. Assessors continually referred to the use of ‘naturally-occurring’ evidence, which was collected through observations, witness testimonies and the use of evidence from actual work-based practices. Overall, this appeared to be an effective approach to the assessment of Workplace Core Skills. The evidence produced had a high level of validity, transparency and authenticity. However, there is often a trade-off between the validity and reliability of assessment methods when using criteria-based assessment. To ensure high levels of reliability in the assessment process required on-going assessor training and development to ensure a consistency of approaches from across those assessing Workplace Core Skills. The evidence from the case studies suggested that there was a need for additional staff development time for vocational assessors to ensure that standards were maintained over time.

It was encouraging to see that centres were beginning to use the SQA ‘profiling’ system and that this was reflected in ‘good practice’ in accrediting certificated prior learning (APCL) from schools. A key point here is that respondents used the school Core Skill profile to validate

existing levels of Workplace Core Skills and not as a mechanism for building progression across the Core Skill framework.

However, there was little evidence of the accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) from across a range of work-based and social and life-skill domains. The use of technology-based approaches for diagnostic assessment by SQA is a positive step that needs to be supported by the other awarding bodies and the Workplace Core Skill centres.

There was little evidence of progression taking place within the Workplace Core Skill levels. Those providers who offered progression generally used diagnostic assessment tools that placed the candidates on the appropriate level of Workplace Core Skills. However, the most common practice was to use the Modern Apprenticeship framework level of Workplace Core Skill as a proxy for the individual training and development needs of candidates. This, unfortunately, often led to a less demanding experience of Workplace Core Skills for candidates. The focus groups tended to confirm this as candidates believed that they could have achieved higher levels of Workplace Core Skills.

The awarding body guidelines on assessment and Workplace Core Skills packs (SQA and IMI) are extensively used by providers. Generally speaking, the guidelines and packs are seen as a 'good start' — and are adapted by users to meet local circumstances. This flexibility in the use of the guidelines and packs should be encouraged.

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# Appendix 2 Interview Questionnaire

## SQA WORKPLACE CORE SKILLS PROJECT

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE (1)

#### ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Respondent Name	
Respondent Title	
Company Name	
Company Address	
Postcode	
Company Telephone Number	

Identity Number	
Interviewer Name	
Interview Number	
Date of interview	

1) Can you tell us what your role is in relation to Workplace Core Skills?

--

2) Is your Workplace Core Skills usage linked to:

Modern Apprenticeships	
Skill Seekers	
Stand Alone	
Other	
Don't know	

3) Please describe your Modern Apprenticeship usage to me.  
[Prompt: level, occupation, well-established?]

Please give details:

--

4) Do you deliver Workplace Core Skills in-house or buy in?

In-house	
Buy in	
Don't know	

5) Where do Workplace Core Skills delivery and assessment occur in your organisation?

Training Centre	
Workplace	
College	
Other	

6) Can you provide me with some information on any evaluation/monitoring procedures regarding Workplace Core Skills that you use within your organisation.

7) How many staff in your organisation deliver Workplace Core Skills?

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

Is there anything else you would like to add in response to these questions?

**ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR LEARNING (APL)**

8) Are you aware of the possibility of using Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) for Workplace Core Skills?

Yes	
No	
Don't know	

Record any additional information in the space below:

9) Please explain your understanding of the Core Skills profile:  
[Prompt: Core Skills from school]

--

10) **[FOR VOCATIONAL SPECIALISTS ONLY]** Do you, as a vocational specialist, feel you understand the concept of the Core Skills profile and how it might relate to your Awards?

Yes	
No	
Don't know	

11) Do you identify candidates' existing Core Skills profiles?

Yes	
No	

If yes, which profiling tools do you use (and add type)?

Paper-based		
Computer-based eg PLATO		
Scottish Qualifications Certificate		
Other		

12) Have you encountered any difficulties in using profiling (paper-based/online) tools?

Yes	
No	
Don't use profiling tools	

Please describe any difficulties you have had in using profiling (paper-based/online) tools:

--

13) When using APL processes, would you consider using the following evidence?

Work Based	
School Based	
Wider Social Activities/Life Experiences	
Other	

14) Do you feel confident and competent in assessing APL to take account of the experience that candidates bring to Workplace Core Skills?

Yes	
No	
Undecided	

Please explain why you do/don't feel confident and competent in assessing APL to take account of experience that candidates bring to Workplace Core Skills:

15) Have you had any training in APL in relation to Workplace Core Skills specifically?

Please describe the training you have had:

### **ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

Is there anything else you would like to add in response to these questions on APL?

## SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE FOR CANDIDATES

16) Do you identify individual candidate's training needs for Workplace Core Skills in your organisation?

Yes	
No	
Don't know	

If yes, **how** do you identify individual candidate's training needs?  
[Prompt on Individual Learning Plans (ILP) and Personal Learning and Support Plan (PLSP)]

--

17) Please describe the on-going support and guidance available in your organisation for Workplace Core Skills candidates:

--

18) In terms of overall contact time, how many hours would you say you spend on support and guidance for candidates?

0 hours	
1–2 hours	
3–4 hours	
5–6 hours	
7–8 hours	
9–10 hours	
11 or more hours	

19) In your organisation, is guidance specifically related to Workplace Core Skills given to candidates on a one-to-one basis or in a group context?

One-to-one	
Group context	
Both one-to-one and group context	

If the candidate already has the level required for the Award, what opportunities do you offer for progression?

--

20) Have you encountered any difficulty in **motivating** candidates about Workplace Core Skills?

Yes	
No	
Don't know/Undecided	

If yes, please expand:

--

21) Have you noticed any difficulty in **retaining** candidates on Workplace Core Skills Units?

Yes	
No	
Don't know/Undecided	

If yes, please expand:

--

22) If retention is a difficulty, what impact does it have on the Modern Apprenticeship?

Please expand:

--

23) Do you think that the Workplace Core Skills component slows down the completion of the Awards overall?

Yes	
No	
Don't know	

Please explain your reasons for this response:

### ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Is there anything else you would like to add in response to these questions on Support and Guidance for Candidates?

### DESIGN AND DELIVERY

24) What do you consider to be the main purpose of Workplace Core Skills? [Prompt: teaching versus assessment]

25) How much time is spent on the **delivery** of Workplace Core Skills? [Prompt: separate out delivery from assessment]

0 days	
½ day	
1 day	
1½ days	
2 days	
2½ days	
3 days	
More than 3 days	

26) Do current funding mechanisms influence the way in which Workplace Core Skills is delivered to and received by candidates?  
 [Prompt: assessed in one day?]

Yes	
No	

If so, in which ways is this manifested?:

27) What is your understanding of Discrete (stand-alone), Integrated (requires planning for integration with portfolios) and Embedded (hidden) provision in relation to Workplace Core Skills?

28) In terms of the following methods, which of these methods of delivery is **most** effective for Workplace Core Skills?

	Discrete	Integrated	Embedded	D/K	Reasons
Communication					
Numeracy					
Information Technology					
Working with Others					
Problem Solving					

29) In thinking about Workplace Core Skills, do you think of them as:

General skills that are transferable	
Skills that are occupationally specific	
Skills that are context/task-specific	
Don't know	

Please expand on this:

30) Do you believe that Workplace Core Skills are:

Individual competencies	
Collective competencies	
Combination of individual and collective competencies	
Don't know	

Please expand on this:

--

31) Do you feel that the level of Workplace Core Skills candidates need to achieve is appropriate for their Award?

Yes	
No	
Don't know	

Please expand on this:

--

32) Do you feel that the SQA Workplace Core Skills are an integral component of Modern Apprenticeships?

Yes	
No	
Don't know	

Please expand on this:

--

33) What materials/resources are used in your organisation for Core Skills delivery and assessment?

Guide to Assessing Workplace Core Skills	
awarding body packs (eg HABS, C&G)	
Locally-generated resources	
Websites	
Other (which?)	

If resources are generated locally, who designs them?

Core Skills Specialist	
Vocational Specialist	
Other (who?)	

Are local generated resources approved by the awarding body concerned?

Yes	
No	
Don't know	

If using the 'Guide to Assessing Workplace Core Skills', which aspects are:

Useful	
Not useful	

If using the awarding body's packs, which aspects are:

Useful	
Not useful	

34) Would you describe the IT (Information Technology) resources available in your organisation (in quality and quantity of computer equipment) as adequate for the purposes of Workplace Core Skills?

	Quantity	Quality
Very Adequate		
Adequate		
Neither adequate/inadequate		
Inadequate		
Very Inadequate		

Please provide further information of improvements suggested:

--

35) Are you given any time/is time allocated in your organisation to develop Workplace Core Skills training/support materials?

Yes	
No	

36) Do you actually do continuous assessment (formative) and **delivery** of Workplace Core Skills in your organisation or is it purely final assessment (summative)?

We do continuous assessment and delivery of Core Skills	
We solely do final assessment of Core Skills	

37) Do you feel that enough time is devoted to the delivery of Workplace Core Skills?

Yes	
No	
Don't know	

Please explain:

--

38) Do you team teach in your delivery of Workplace Core Skills in your organisation?

Yes	
No	

If yes, with whom?

--

Do you consider team teaching to be good practice?

Yes	
No	
Don't know	

39) In order to share good practice, have you considered collaborating/working with other employers/training organisations to provide assessment and training provision, ie through an assessment centre?

Yes	
No	
Don't know	

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

Is there anything else you would like to add in response to these questions on Design and Delivery of Core Skills?

--

**ASSESSMENT**

40) Do you use any form of diagnostic assessment for candidates?

Yes	
No	

If no, how do you ensure the level of Workplace Core Skill is appropriate for the candidate?

--

41) What contingencies are in place, if any, for those candidates operating at a level below that required for their chosen qualification?

--

42) How much time do you spend **assessing** Workplace Core Skills?

0 days	
½ day	
1 day	
1½ days	
2 days	
2½ days	
3 days	
More than 3 days	

43) Do you feel that enough time is devoted to assessment?

Yes	
No	
Don't know	

Please explain:

--

44) Which assessment methods do you use most frequently?

[Prompt: tick all that apply]

Simulations	
Witness testimony	
SQA packs (NABs)	
Weaving evidence through SVQ portfolio	
Reference to Core Skill signposting produced by SSCs	

45) How would you provide opportunities to gather evidence for Workplace Core Skills throughout the candidate's portfolio?

--

46) Do you offer separate delivery and assessment sessions on Workplace Core Skills in your organisation?

Yes	
No	

If the answer is Yes, please explain

[Prompt: try and find out why]

--

47) Do you provide opportunities for reassessment (remediation) of Workplace Core Skills?

[Prompt: try to establish how many candidates may be involved in reassessment]

Yes	
No	
Don't know	

If no candidates are ever reassessed what do you think the reason for this may be?

--

48) Would you like to see any changes in the arrangements for assessment or the way it is carried out?

Yes	
No	
Don't know	

Please describe your recommendations:

### **ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

Is there anything else you would like to add in response to these questions on Workplace Core Skills Assessment?

## STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT

49) Can you highlight any training or certification which you have that demonstrates competence for Workplace Core Skills delivery and assessment?

[Prompt: D32, D33, Assessor and Verifier (A/V) Awards etc]

	Already have	Working towards
Teaching Qualification		
Subject Based Qualification		
Assessor Awards		
Core Skill Awards		

50) In terms of **internal** moderation for Workplace Core Skills, what support do you receive?

51) In terms of **external** moderation for Workplace Core Skills, what support do you receive?

52) When you first began delivering and assessing Workplace Core Skills, did you receive all the support that you required?

Yes	
No	
Undecided	

If so, please comment on the nature of the difficulty:

53) How much training have you received on Workplace Core Skills?

0 days	
½ day	
1 day	
1½ days	
2 days	
2½ days	
3 days	
More than 3 days	

54) Who advised you on Workplace Core Skills initially?

awarding body	
Line Manager	
Core Skills Specialist	
Vocational Colleagues	
External Verifier	
Combination of these (which?)	
Other (nobody?)	

55) What advice did you get that was particularly:

Useful	
Not useful	

56) If the advice was unhelpful? Please explain:

--

57) What kind of information did you most need in the initial stages?

--

58) Do you feel adequately supported and guided in your delivery/assessment of Workplace Core Skills in your organisation?

Very supported	
Moderately supported Neither supported/unsupported	
Moderately unsupported	
Not supported	

How could this be improved?:

59) To what extent did you feel that the person who advised you was adequately knowledgeable about Workplace Core Skills?

Very knowledgeable	
Knowledgeable	
Neither K/NK	
Not knowledgeable	
Very unknowledgeable	

Did you find this advice:

Very easy to follow	
Easy to follow Neither easy/difficult	
Difficult to follow	
Very difficult to follow	

60) Are there any opportunities in your organisation to get feedback on your delivery/assessment of Workplace Core Skills?

Yes	
No	

What form do these mechanisms on feedback take?

61) Over the past calendar year, how much time on staff development have you spent specifically on Workplace Core Skills?

0 days	
½ day	
1 day	
1½ days	
2 days	
2½ days	
3 days	
More than 3 days	

62) How easy or difficult would you say it is to find out what training may be available both within and out-with your organisation on Workplace Core Skills?

Very easy	
Fairly easy	
Neither easy nor difficult	
Fairly difficult	
Very difficult	

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

Is there anything else you would like to add in response to these questions on Staff Development and Support?

**GENERAL COMMENTS**

63) Is there anything else you would like to add more generally?

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP!**

# Appendix 3 Focus Group Framework

## SQA WORKPLACE CORE SKILLS PROJECT

### FOCUS GROUPS — CANDIDATES

Identity Number	
Company Name	
Contact Person	
Designation	
Company Address	
Postcode	
Company Telephone Number	
Names of Facilitators	
Date of Focus Group	

1) Can you tell us what the five Core Skills are?

2) Do you know if they can be taken at different levels?  
... and what are the levels?

3) Did you do Core Skills at school?  
If so, what do you remember about them?

4) What is a 'Core Skills Profile'? Do you know if you have one?

5) Did you attend Core Skills taught courses as part of your current work programme (eg MA)?  
Can you give us an idea of the topics you have covered?

6) Did you learn anything new? If so, what did you learn?

7) Were you assessed on your Core Skill? How did that work?  
Who did the assessing?

8) How useful was your Core Skills teaching/assessment?  
Had you already covered the topics before?  
Did it motivate/de-motivate you?

9) Are there any other issues/suggestions about Core Skills you would  
like to raise before we finish?

**THANK YOU**