



Leading learning and skills



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Developing excellence in E2E series

Improving initial assessment within E2E

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Hints and Tips for Providers

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For

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Foreword

This is one booklet in a series of 'Hints and Tips for Providers.' These booklets are to be used to promote continuous improvement and the spreading of best practice for those providers who deliver the Entry to Employment (E2E) programme for young people. They will support providers bringing about a marked increase in the quality of their delivery. They have been produced by the Learning and Skills Council Greater Manchester in association with consultants Lynne Clough and Richard Sharples who are the authors of the series.

The 'Thematic Review of Entry to Employment,' published by the Adult Learning Inspectorate in early 2005, stated the areas for improvement within E2E. Some of these are:

- Providers do not use data sufficiently to measure and improve achievement. They tend to collect only that data required by their contracts.
- Few providers make an adequate assessment of individual learners' needs and fewer still follow this up with a well-designed programme of learning.
- General goals/objectives are set, but seldom broken down into smaller, measurable targets. Target setting and reviews of learners' progress are often inadequate.
- In the first year of E2E only thirty four percent of learners progressed into work-based learning, further education or employment. If E2E is to be more successful, it seems reasonable to expect more emphasis on vocational learning and better provision of literacy, numeracy and language and key skills.

The 'Hints and Tips for Providers' series has therefore been developed as an improvement aid for staff delivering the E2E programme. The four booklets in the series cover:

1. Collecting, analysing and using data within E2E
2. Improving initial assessment within E2E
3. Agreeing objectives and targets within E2E
4. Improving positive progression in E2E.

We hope you find that using these booklets will support you in enhancing the experience and skills of learners and improving their opportunities to progress.



John Korzeniewski Executive Director

'Few providers make an adequate assessment of individual learners' needs and fewer still follow this up with a well-designed programme of learning'

Entry to Employment: Looking back over the first year and forward to the future,
Adult Learning Inspectorate, 2005

Introduction

This document aims to offer E2E providers a series of hints and tips to support them in carrying out initial assessment with E2E learners.

Initial assessment is a process of gathering information from a young person regarding their:

- career aims and aspirations
- their progression aim at the end of E2E
- their previous experience and achievements
- their learning and support needs, including those factors which are likely to be barriers to them achieving their progression aim.

*The Initial Assessment Summary*¹ document of the learner's *E2E Passport* identifies 10 areas which should be considered with each young person during their initial assessment, to build a comprehensive picture of their overall needs:

- Achievements, qualifications and prior experience/learning
- Learning experience
- Language, Literacy, Numeracy, ESOL and key skills
- Career preferences and suitability
- Interests and hobbies
- Learning difficulties or other support needs
- Learning style
- Personal and social skills
- Health
- Personal circumstances
- Other relevant information.

There are a wide range of methods which can be used to carry out initial assessment with young people in E2E including:

- 1:1 Interviews
- Reviewing information provided by referral agencies or others that have previous knowledge of a young person including schools and other organisations
- Reviewing any written information supplied by the young person themselves
- Formal assessments or tests
- Self-assessment questionnaires
- Observed activities
- Projects or activities designed to gather certain information
- Practical vocational activities such as work tasters.

Typically providers will use a combination of these and not rely on one method alone. They will be introduced during the initial assessment phase as the learner feels comfortable. Initial assessment within E2E should be an engaging and positive experience for a learner and seek to identify both a learner's strengths and areas for development. Emphasis on formal testing during the very early stages should be avoided where this might run the risk of disengaging those who have previously found this a negative learning experience.

The initial assessment process within E2E is typically a two-phase process. It begins with the young person and their Connexions Service Personal Adviser prior to referral to E2E.

The Personal Adviser is likely to use *The Connexions Framework for Assessment, Planning, Implementation and Review (APIR)*² to help them carry out initial assessment. The framework identifies 18 individual factors, which they can choose to look at with the young person. Many Personal Advisers use the factors to structure an interview or series of interviews with a young person. The factors are grouped under 4 principal headings:

- education and employment factors
- family and environmental factors
- social and behavioural development factors
- physical health factors.

Annexe 1 shows how the 18 APIR factors feed in to the 10 areas identified within the *Initial Assessment Summary* document.

Personal Advisers should capture the outcomes of the initial assessment process, which they have carried out with a young person on the Connexions *Referral Form*, which constitutes the first part of the learner's *E2E Passport*. With the young person's agreement this should be shared with the E2E provider.

The second phase of the initial assessment process is carried out by the E2E provider and can last between two and six weeks, depending on the needs of the young person. In planning the process the provider will need to take account of information made available by the Personal Adviser. Good practice in initial assessment will involve building on what has

gone before and not simply repeating the process. A Personal Adviser for example may have gathered information from a young person regarding their perceived level of literacy and numeracy skills. The E2E provider will use this information to decide on what further formal screening, initial and diagnostic assessment is required.

During the provider's initial assessment phase they should complete the *Initial Assessment Summary* document within the learner's *E2E Passport*. This document aims to provide a summary of the information gathered from the learner during initial assessment, and the action and support that they will require during the course of their E2E programme. At the end of the initial assessment process the completed document should be reviewed with the learner. It should be used to identify their key objectives to support their progression aim and plan their E2E programme.

A well completed *Initial Assessment Summary* will clearly capture the 'starting point' of the young person to their programme and allow the distance travelled from this to be subsequently measured. The LSC has published on its website (www.lsc.gov.uk) *E2E Passport Exemplar*³ which includes a completed *Initial Assessment Summary* document.

² *The Connexions Framework for Assessment, Planning, Implementation and Review*, Connexions Service National Unit, 2001

³ *E2E Passport Exemplar*, Skillcom, 2004

¹ *The E2E Passport*, LSC, 2004

? Hint and Tip 1 – Devise a clear process for carrying out initial assessment with E2E learners

It is essential to devise a clear process for carrying out initial assessment within E2E. Capturing the process in a written procedure will also help ensure that there is consistency by staff in the way initial assessment is carried out and that each learner has the same quality of experience. Your process should define:

- Who will be responsible for planning learners' initial assessment programmes
- How initial assessment programmes will be responsive to the needs of individual learners
- What information needs to be collected during the initial assessment process
- What methods will be used to gather information from learners and those who have worked with them previously
- When information will be collected
- Who will collect the information
- How the outcomes will be captured
- How the information will be used to inform the next stage of the learner's journey, the planning of their programme
- How the process will be monitored and quality assured

? Hint and Tip 2 – Observe staff carrying out the initial assessment process in order to promote continuous improvement

With any learning process and procedure it is important to make sure that staff use it and follow it in the way in which it is intended. Observation of staff carrying out initial assessment will not only allow you to check this, but will also help you promote continuous improvement by identifying what does not work and where staff can improve what they do in order to improve the quality of the

learner's experience. Providing clear feedback to staff will be an essential part of this.

? Hint and Tip 3 – Seek learner feedback on the initial assessment process as part of your continuous improvement arrangements

As part of your quality assurance arrangements you will seek feedback from learners during the course of their programme. Probably the first feedback that you will gather from them will be in relation to the early stages of their programme. This will include recruitment, induction and also initial assessment. Gathering feedback from learners on their experiences of these key processes will help inform where you need to make improvements in the process.

? Hint and Tip 4 – Carry out audit checks on completed *Initial Assessment Summary* documents to make sure that they reflect a high quality initial assessment process

The *Initial Assessment Summary* document is designed to capture the outcomes of the learner's initial assessment process. Within E2E poorly completed documents often indicate an ineffective initial assessment process. Introducing an audit system whereby completed documentation is sampled and checked at regular intervals might well give an indication of how well the process is working. In addition, it might also identify those staff who need further help and support in correctly completing documentation.

? Hint and Tip 5 – Ensure that the learner understands the purpose of the initial assessment process and the benefits

It is important that E2E learners understand the purpose of the initial assessment process and the benefits of this to them. If they do not understand why they are being asked to carry out certain activities they may not see the benefits and become quickly disillusioned. They need to be given regular feedback on those activities which they carry out so that they can learn from their experiences.

Learners are often at higher risk of dropping out during the early stages of their programme when they are settling in and therefore they need to be actively engaged in their programme from the start.

? Hint and Tip 6 – Use the two- to six-week period to carry out a thorough initial assessment of each E2E learner

Initial assessment has been identified in successive ALI Chief Inspector's reports as an on-going weakness within work-based learning. During the pathfinder stage of E2E it was recognised that one of the factors that enabled more effective initial assessment to be carried out was where providers spent longer on this activity and not just limited it to either one day or one week. Initial assessment has long been regarded as the most important stage in the learning cycle as successive stages are totally dependent on this. Failure to adequately identify a learner's needs is likely to result in a plan which does not take account of their needs. It is therefore well worth investing time upfront on this activity to help ensure that the learner sets off on the right course for their E2E journey, and that their journey is a smooth one.

Not all learners however will require a full six weeks assessment although all are likely to require a minimum of two weeks. The amount of time spent on initial assessment will depend on the needs of the learner as well as on how much information is available from referral agencies. Those young people with multiple and complex issues and barriers are likely to require a longer period than those with fewer issues.

? Hint and Tip 7 – Use a range of different methods to carry out initial assessment

In the introduction we identified a range of different methods that can be used to carry out initial assessment within E2E. For some of these there are a wide range of free or commercial products available on the market which can be used to support the process. The Standards Unit of the Department for Education and Skills⁴ for example has recently widely distributed materials to support the observation of personal and social skills during initial assessment. The Department of Education and Skills⁵ has also identified many examples of different methods and products available to providers to support them in the initial assessment process.

Often it will be important to use a range of different methods to gather and compare information on a particular subject. A learner for example during an initial interview might express an interest in working in retail.

⁴ *Improving initial assessment of personal and social skills in Entry to Employment*, Department for Education and Skills, 2004

⁵ *Initial assessment of learning and support needs and planning learning to meet needs*, QPID Good Practice Series, Department for Education and Employment, 2001

The learner's understanding and their suitability for working in this area might be further assessed during the initial assessment through use of an occupational questionnaire which looks at common activities within retail, and a short work taster. The collective information will help determine the preferred career aim.

It will be useful for providers to identify which methods and products can best support the gathering of information in each of the ten identified areas in the *Initial Assessment Summary* document.

In promoting equal opportunities during initial assessment some providers feel that it is necessary to use the same methods with all learners regardless of their particular needs. This might be regarded however as the 'sheep-dip' approach. What is more important is that there are a range of different methods and products which all learners can have access to during the initial assessment process.

? Hint and Tip 8 – Gather as much information as you can from referral sources to assist your own initial assessment planning

The *E2E Passport* contains two referral forms, one for use by Connexions Service Personal Advisers and the other for other organisations which choose to refer young people to E2E. The forms aim to capture the information gathered by the referral agency during their own initial assessment process with the young person. With agreement from the young person, this information will be shared with the provider in order to provide a seamless service for them.

On some occasions providers may find that the completed referral form which they receive, does not contain as much information as might

be anticipated for the length of time with which the referral agency has been working with the young person. If this is the case the provider should not hesitate in trying to establish whether further information is available from the referral agency. If not the provider may run the risk of carrying out activities, which have already been undertaken which in turn might result in a negative reaction from the learner. It goes without saying that the more information that a provider receives in advance of a learner joining them, the more effective both the planning and carrying out of the process are likely to be.

? Hint and Tip 9 – Identify the learner's preferred progression aim during the initial assessment phase

Some learners have a clear idea on their preferred progression route when they start E2E whilst others may be unclear. All learners however should receive information advice and guidance on E2E progression routes and Personal Advisers are likely to have begun this process prior to referral.

Providers will want to assist E2E learners in weighing up the advantages and disadvantages of each route before a decision is made. This might be done for example through individual discussions, group activities, presentations from ex-learners who have progressed on to different routes or through short tasters of different experiences.

The key advantage of identifying a likely progression route early on for a learner is that their key objectives can be identified to support this and provide a clear focus. Some learners will of course later change their minds but this does really not matter as long as the provider can adapt to the changing circumstance.

? Hint and Tip 10 – Ensure that the completed *Initial Assessment Summary* document reflects the 'starting point' of the learner to their programme

The *Initial Assessment Summary* document of the learner's Passport is designed to record the key outcomes of their initial assessment. A well-completed document will provide someone who has little knowledge of the learner with a good overview of the needs of the learner and provide a clear starting point to their programme. This is important for several reasons, not least because it will provide the basis on which distance travelled can be measured, but also because often in E2E many different staff are involved in delivering various aspects of the learner's programme and they will all benefit from an overall picture of the learner. The document will also be useful where staff changes occur in providing useful background to a new member of staff.

Many providers find it useful to use the *Initial Assessment Summary* as a working document during the initial assessment process, updating it as information is gathered. At the end of the process they will review the gathered information with the learner to check that all key information has been recorded.

? Hint and Tip 11 – Use the results of initial assessment to inform the planning of learning

Use the results of initial assessment to inform the planning of the learner's E2E programme. The areas identified for support in the right hand column on the *Initial Assessment Summary* document should inform the setting of the key objectives for the learner. If you cannot see obvious links when auditing

learners Passport documentation you may need to review these with the learner.

In order to help the learner meet their identified objectives, appropriate learning modules should be selected from your E2E curriculum. Each module should have clearly identified learning objectives and outcomes which can support the achievement of learners' key objectives.

? Hint and Tip 12 – Where possible try and offer accreditation opportunities during the initial assessment process

Many learners who join E2E programmes often have few, recognised previous achievements. Some E2E providers have found it very beneficial to offer opportunities for learners to gain accreditation during the initial assessment phase. Informal awards such as *Youth Achievement Awards*⁶ and *Profile of Achievement*⁶ are examples of some which have been found to be particularly useful. Awards that allow learners to identify their own targets, help them make choices about their progressions or career aims and can be achieved in four to six weeks are most appropriate.

? Hint and Tip 13 – Celebrate learner success during the initial assessment phase

Achievement of awards and certificates as well as progress in learning should be celebrated both during and at the end of the initial assessment process. Providers who regularly do this, report that it can be a powerful motivator for learners to undertake further learning.

⁶National Framework of Awards in Non-Formal Educational Settings, The National Youth Agency, 2003

