Skills Development Scotland

Guide to conducting a Needs Assessment

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Making Skills Work for Scotland

Skills Development Scotland

Guide to conducting a Needs Assessment

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Introduction

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) works with partners to ensure that Work Based Learning Programmes (WBL: Foundation Apprenticeships, Modern Apprenticeships, Graduate Apprenticeships and Employability Fund Provision) are attractive and accessible to all.

Context

SDS and our Learning Providers must actively encourage equality of opportunity on Work Based Learning programmes.

This guide has been developed to help Learning Providers to create the safe and confidential environment where the Provider can discuss with Apprentices the support they need to have in place and recommend reasonable adjustments to the employer where appropriate.

There are many specialist organisations you may find it helpful to contact both to advise on undertaking a needs assessment and identifying appropriate support.

Section 1: What is a Needs Assessment?

1.1 The purpose of Needs Assessment
Needs Assessment is the process by which an individual's abilities, goals, actual and potential support needs are identified so that appropriate action can be planned, resources obtained and support implemented.

1.2 Distinguishing a Needs Assessment from other types of assessment
The term 'assessment' is used in a wide range of contexts and means different things, depending on the purpose for which it is being carried out. It is important to distinguish the Needs Assessment process from other types of assessment. Needs assessors must be clear about their role and be able to communicate this effectively.

A Needs Assessment will not result in a diagnosis. What an effective Needs Assessment will do is acknowledge the implications of the person's condition, consider the most appropriate way(s) of overcoming barriers to progress and make recommendations accordingly. As a rule, Needs Assessment should only be undertaken if it is likely to make a positive difference to the experience of the person being assessed.

Types of support

Provision of techniques and training	• Coping strategies • Self-management skills • Behavioural techniques • Confidence building
Provision of resources	• Assistive technology, equipment and devices • Adaptations to environment • Alternative activity/materials
Provision of support	• Coach • Supervisor/prompter • Mentor • Support from specialist organisation

1.3 Getting started

Begin by reflecting on your existing skills and any relevant experience you have had already. If assessing the capabilities and support needs of apprentices is an activity that you carry out on a regular basis, either formally or informally, it is likely that you will already possess many of the attributes shown in the list below, which refers to the core characteristics competent needs assessors:

• shows empathy with people

• demonstrates the ability to communicate effectively with others

• has the desire to help individuals develop

• shows concern for integrity of own judgements

• is capable of using varied approaches to develop different skills in others

• understands the context, the job content and the required standards

• has appropriate expectations of others' performance

• identifies individuals' strengths and weakness in relation to outcomes

• gives advice on a range of strategies and different ways to achieve goals

Use the table on the next page to identify your own strength or areas to develop as a needs assessor

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Attribute	I think I'm strong in this area already	I'm keen to develop this skill	Current self-score (where 1 = weak; 5 = highly skilled)
Showing empathy with people			
• Demonstrating the ability to communicate effectively with others			
• Having a desire to help individuals develop			
Showing concern for integrity of own judgements			
• Capable of using varied approaches to develop different skills in others			
• Understanding context, job content and required standards			
• Having appropriate expectations of others' performance			
• Identifying individuals' strengths and weakness in relation to outcomes			
• Giving advice on a range of strategies and different ways to achieve goals			

Section 2: Preparing to conduct a Needs Assessment

2.1 Obtain permission to gather information if required
In the course of the Needs Assessment it may be necessary to gather sensitive, personal information from a range of sources and subsequently share it. Sometimes the apprentice will be able to provide all the information required on their disability and/or the support required.

If you do have to gather additional sensitive information it is vitally important that permission is obtained from the person being assessed before any third-party source (e.g. job coach, teacher, personal adviser, social worker, third sector organisation) is approached for information.

2.2 Protect sensitive information
The Data Protection Act (DPA) is based around eight principles of 'good information handling'. These give people specific rights in relation to their personal information and place certain obligations on those organisations that are responsible for processing it. The sensitive personal data contained in Needs Assessment reports, and applications to the EFC must be handled in compliance with current legislation.

Key terms:

QUALITATIVE DATA: Collected thoughts, observations, opinions and words. Difficult to measure, count or express in numerical terms.

QUANTITATIVE DATA: Numeric information expressed as a graph, spreadsheet, statistical report or rating scale. Can be counted and measured but may be more difficult for some people to interpret.

SENSITIVE PERSONAL DATA: Information relating to an identifiable individual that refers to that person's race, ethnicity, beliefs, physical or mental health, political opinion, trade union activity, sexual life and any conviction or alleged offence.

DATA PROTECTION: Techniques such as file locking, encryption and use of passcodes to restrict access to information whilst ensuring availability to legitimate users.

Section 3: The Needs Assessment process

HOW TO:

3.1 Set-up a Needs Assessment meeting

It is important that everyone involved in the Needs Assessment process understands its purpose and knows what to expect.

Adequate preparation in advance of meeting the individual will help to ensure that the time available for completing the Needs Assessment is used well. A pre-meeting checklist – to assist in the set-up stage of the process – is included in the Appendices, appendix 2.

3.2 Conduct a fair and effective interview

Interviewing is arguably the most important tool available in the assessment of an apprentice's needs. When conducted effectively, the Needs Assessment interview allows for the building of trust and the gathering of a wealth of relevant information, providing a firm and fair foundation for the actions that will follow. A skilled Needs Assessor asks questions – and actively listens to the responses – with the aim of unlocking potential and enabling that individual to maximise their performance, increase their level of independence and/or improve their productivity.

A fair and effective Needs Assessment has these characteristics:

- Non-judgemental but discerning

- Empathetic

- Based on trust and respect

- Objective and unbiased

- Emphasises strengths

- Focuses on solutions

- Leads to change

- Holds both parties accountable

The benefits to the apprentice of an effective needs assessment:

- Helps the apprentice to think more clearly about things

- Makes the apprentice feel valued and listened to

- Increases the apprentice's level of motivation and engagement

- Recognises the apprentice's skills and strengths

- Clarifies what the apprentice wants to improve and/or achieve

- Identifies what the apprentice needs to contribute or commit to do

- Builds the apprentice's confidence and optimism about the future

3.3 Match identified needs with appropriate solutions

The purpose of the Needs Assessment is to identify what an individual requires in order to have access to a particular activity or environment. Access is about making it possible for someone to do something by removing a barrier or introducing a solution. The solutions that the Needs Assessment will typically identify can be grouped into three categories:

1. Provision of Support

2. Provision of Resources

3. Provision of Techniques/training

In Appendix 4 to this handbook, you will find a chart that summarises the types of need, some examples of solutions for each type of need and an indication of the levels of need/priority.

3.4 Summarise the findings of the Needs Assessment

When you have completed an assessment of an individual's needs, you will be in a position to determine how best to provide appropriate support. If the individual requires support and/or assistive equipment which is not available from other sources, you may wish to consider an application to the ASN Access Fund or Access to Work/Enhanced Funding.

If you would like help regarding the Enhanced Fund from the Equality Team contact your Skills Investment Adviser or e mail us at **Equality.Apprenticeships@sds.co.uk**

Appendix 1: Needs Assessment Readiness Audit (NARA)

Facilities						
Accommodation fulfils the requirements for a conducive assessment environment (as set out in the pre-meeting checklist):						
Current position on scale:	1	2	3	4	5	6
Why?						

Administration						
A compliant system for handling sensitive data (as set out in section 2.3 of the NA guide) is in place and there is capacity to handle incoming and onward referrals efficiently (as set out in section 2.2 of the NA guide):						
Current position on scale:	1	2	3	4	5	6
Why?						

Confidence						
Robust and reliable needs assessment process undertaken by competent, knowledgeable needs assessor(s) who are well trained and supported:						
Current position on scale:	1	2	3	4	5	6
Why?						

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Time

Adequate allocation of staff hours to needs assessment activity and/or a willingness to authorise time as needed:

Current position on scale:	1	2	3	4	5	6
Why?						

Sources

Contact with eligible clients and access to information about resources, suppliers and service providers in the locality

Current position on scale:	1	2	3	4	5	6
Why?						

Why?

Facilities

Action Required:

Administration

Action Required:

Confidence

Action Required:

Time

Action Required:

Sources

Action Required:

AUDITOR's Signature	LINE MANAGER'S Signature
Date	Date

Appendix 2: Pre-Meeting Good Practice Checklist

Pre-assessment preparation	Comments
Appropriate choice of venue	
• Accessibility • Alternative to stairs (lift/ramp) • Distance from entrance • Ease of evacuation in an emergency • Signage • Reception/welcome on arrival • Assistance on hand if needed, eg Interpreter • Notification of colleague	
Client's (and assessor's) comfort	
• Privacy • Seating • Writing surface • Space for manoeuvring • Lighting • Acoustics • Ambience • Room temperature • Ventilation • Availability of drinking water • Availability of paper tissues • Proximity to toilet facilities	
Preparation for needs assessment	
• Availability of background information on individual • Familiarity with referral route • Access to transitional/other provider reports • Knowledge of potential barriers associated with apprentice's condition/situation • Clarity of purpose – what the meeting will achieve and how long it is likely to take • Agreed means of recording/noting assessment findings • Required pro-forma to hand (eg. permission form) • Pre-testing of any devices/demonstrations • Awareness of available provision/resources	
Other requirements?	

Appendix 3: Factors Affecting Employability

Factors giving rise to potential support needs/affecting employability

In any given situation, the factors affecting an individual's employability will vary. Among the most significant factors will be the inclusiveness of the environment and the commitment of the employer/learning provider – but the individual's capacity to learn and work effectively may also be influenced by one or more of the factors included in this table – which is not intended as an exhaustive list, but as a prompt when assessing potential support needs.

Hand function dexterity/fine motor control legibility of script onset of fatigue when writing IT/keyboard skills management of pain	**Mobility** use of aids degree of restriction posture/flexibility/stamina comfort in sitting/standing balance/co-ordination
Reading and numeracy functional skill level prior use of assistive software accuracy and attention to detail commitment	**Cognitive skills** organisation of ideas/planning insight and self-awareness confidence coping strategies
Memory and concentration short-term/long-term reliability of recall recording/coding attention span	**Communication** receptive (attention/insight) expressive (oral/speech/fluency) use of augmentative aids sociability
Hearing and Vision use of aids degree of hearing/sight loss experience of using assistive devices/software	**Mental wellbeing** anxiety/stress depression/illness impact of substance use effects of medication

Consideration should **ALWAYS** be given to the demands of the job/training and the issues arising because of these demands. No amount of support will fully compensate if there is an inherent mismatch between the potential of the individual and the demands of the task/role/activity.

When is a support strategy appropriate?

a) When the recommended solution (equipment or strategy) will be used to remove a 'barrier' in the environment.

b) When the recommended solution will further enhance the skill or ability that the individual already possesses.

c) When the recommended solution will increase the likelihood of the individual achieving success commensurate with his/her ability level.

d) When the recommended solutions are likely to make a significant difference in the individual's performance and/or sustainability and achievement.

Appendix 4: Types of Assessed Need

Provision of Support
Personal assistant

Supervisor/prompter
Coach

Co-worker/peer
Level of need may be:
i) Changing over time
ii) Constant
iii) Variable/Fluctuating

Provision of Resources
Adaptations to environment

Assistive devices Alternative activity Additional time
Resourcing priority may be:
i) Time-critical
ii) Fundamental
iii) Beneficial

Provision of Techniques/Training
Coping strategies

Self-management skills
Behavioural techniques

Confidence building
Provision may be:
i) In-house or External
ii) Open access or via referral
iii) Charged/free

Appendix 5: Needs Assessment Interview Checklist

Using a solution focussed approach engages the apprentice in looking forward and developing solutions by eliciting significant and helpful information. It is not always helpful or necessary to explore the "why" of the apprentice's situation nor have the apprentice describe all the things that did not work in the past.

Open questions that ask about positive experiences will help in the gathering of information and identification of possible solutions:

"Tell me about a time when you had a good experience of training &/or learning"

"What made it a good experience for you?"

"Can you tell me about any .... (equipment, software, techniques, support from a person or an organisation) you have tried/used before that was helpful"

"Are you aware of other support or equipment that could help you?"

"How could we improve your experience of training &/or learning?"

"Is there someone who has helped you that might be able to advise us how to improve your learning/training experience or tells us about other support that would help you?"

Appendix 6: Structuring the interview

Time	Aim for less than one hour and be aware that some apprentices will need a break or to change position. Be prepared to alter the seating positions, lighting, etc. Have any forms or software you want to look at with you/ already set up.
Contracting	• Welcome the apprentice and establish rapport • Check apprentice is clear about the purpose of the meeting • Agree you will make a note of the meeting and that the information will be respected and handled to maintain confidentiality • Indicate how long it will take and that there can be breaks if the apprentice wishes at any point • If others are present or joining ideally this should have been agreed in advance but introduce and say why they are present
Information gathering	• Using open questions get the apprentice to describe the support they have used that works in learning and training situations. • Encourage them to talk by adopting active listening skills
Summarising	• This reassures the apprentice that you have understood what has been said and is an opportunity for any misunderstandings to be rectified • A good summary is a springboard to the next phase
Exploring solutions	• Establish what the key support requirements are for success in the workplace and in undertaking the qualification, training and assessments. • Or is the support required for sustaining related to the Individual's circumstances such as for strategies for independent living and household management, dealing with anxiety, managing a condition that varies, • Is more information required from a specialist organisation? • Will training of Provider or employer staff be required? • What funding or other options are there? It might be that some of this happens after this meeting.

Appendix 6: Structuring the interview

Agreeing next steps	**Agree with the apprentice:** • What actions you will be undertaking eg learn more about the software available to support apprentices with dyslexia and any training that would be required; • What they should do whilst support is being investigated and set up • Who will communicate with their employer/supervisor/assessor what has been agreed • When the next meeting will be or when the arrangements will be reviewed
Ending	**It is helpful to draw everything together at the end:** • Reiterate the main actions agreed • Say you will provide a written summary to the apprentice, or alternative format, check e mail address to send to • Agree the next meeting or date of update • Say how to contact you in the interim or if not you whom they should contact if they have concerns or wish to add something before the next meeting date.

Appendix 7: Practical Exercises

Activity 1:

Discuss the groups/individuals that you feel would most benefit from a Needs Assessment within your organisation.

Activity 2: Are you ready to Needs Assess?

• PIn Section 1.3, you'll find a page headed 'Getting started' – with a list of attributes.

• Take a few minutes to consider your own skills and experience before completing the grid by scoring yourself for each attribute.

• In which areas are you strong already?

• What skills are you keen to develop?

• How might you develop?

Activity 3: Mock Interview/Observation:

Scenario: When you return to your workplace after completing this training, your colleagues make it clear that they're delighted you're going to be the department's needs assessor.

Activity: With two colleagues, explore how you feel about this role and use the solution focused approach. The activity has 3 roles and you will need about half an hour and the observer should make a note of the interview using the pro-forma provided.

1): Interviewee: Think about the challenges of becoming your department's needs assessor

(2): Interviewers: Ask questions to find out how the interviewee feels about becoming a needs assessor and how they will approach this role.

(3) Observers: Actively listen to the dialogue and categorise the questions.

What did you learn?