UNQUALIFIED SUCCESS

Life skills Work skills

A REPORT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SOFT SKILLS MEASUREMENT TOOL FOR EMPLOYMENT PROJECTS

FUNDED BY THE HACKNEY STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP JOBS AND ECONOMY SUB-PARTNERSHIP

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Introduction and Executive Summary

Background Information

In October 2003 the London Borough of Hackney, Jobs and Economy Sub-partnership of the Hackney Strategic Partnership invited tenders for the provision of a soft skills measurement tool. This was undertaken as part of the JEP priority activities for 2003/4 as a ‘means by which the progress or distance travelled of a client undertaking soft skills training or support will be quantified and reported’.

Soft skills training and support are an essential element of an individual’s ability to find employment but this is often overlooked when assessing the merits of a training programme or costing the work needed to get a person to employability.

The aim of the project is to deliver a tool that can be used by training providers and funders to measure the impact, both long and short term, of soft skills training. Further, the research had to answer the following questions:

- Do soft skills training/support programmes meet the needs of employers?
- Do current soft skills training/support programmes meet the requirements of employment training funders?
- What are the baseline unit costs for delivering soft skills elements?

The tender document asked that the tool be developed alongside the delivery of soft skills training in order to ensure that the tool fits with examples of best practice provision. London Borough of Hackney would own the tool, as it was developed using Neighbourhood Renewal Funds allocated by the Hackney Strategic Partnership. This would enable the Borough to ask training providers to use the tool as part of contracting processes or make the tool freely available through the Hackney web-site.

Softer Skills

The project team identified the softer skills for employment as:

- Communication – verbal and non-verbal
- Motivation
- Confidence
- Working with others
- Time management
- Self management

There are many issues packaged within these broad headings, some employers have described the skills they want as ‘the right attitude’ and this may encompass responding to authority, turning up on time, dressing to fit in, being able to work on own initiative as well as other issues specific to that organisation.

In developing a generic tool on employability the team has tried to package the issues research on employer requirements has identified into three broad headings for clients to look at:

- How you feel
- How you look
- How you perform
Target beneficiaries

The project team identified the key target group for a softer skills measurement tool would be those unemployed between the ages of 16-50. Such a tool would particularly benefit:

- Those in training or education for whom achieving a recognised qualification is unlikely within the timescale available
- Those who have been unsuccessful in the labour market
- Young people
- Those who are hard to engage in learning
- Those without previous experience of success in learning or work
- Those at some distance from the labour market due to a lack of softer skills

Additionally, the tool would benefit training organisations by providing evidence of where success and distance travelled has been achieved when this is not a job or qualification and it would benefit funders by providing some measurement of where public money has been beneficial for individual clients.

Research and Development

The project team started with an assumption that there is no softer skills measurement tool being used on a recognised and wide scale basis for employability: if such a tool existed then this work would not have been tendered. The team decided to look at a wide range of subject areas and not limit the research to education and employment. The project team reasoned that there might be suitable tools being used in other sectors, such as health or social care that, could be adapted for use with employment outcomes. Further, the lessons gained from other sectors on how to develop a valid measurement scale would be used to ensure best practice in the development of the tool.

The project team looked at developing a tool with as wide an application as possible for employability skills. The team identified the need to ensure that clients met an employment cultural norm that research on employer requirements had identified, and a need to ensure that whatever was developed was user friendly to clients, training organisations and to funders. The main driver for the development of the tool was that it captured distance travelled on softer skills for employment, that delivery of this would be cost and time effective and that funders would be able to recognise soft outputs in a meaningful way.

Timescale, project team and outputs

The timescale for this work was very short at four months. HTEN brought together a team of experienced researchers and consultants (see appendix 1) to carry out separate but concurrent areas of work, with project management from HTEN.

- Desk and field research
- Recruitment and management of organisations to test the tool
- Development and testing of a tool
- Independent internal evaluation

Unqualified Success
HTEN March 2004
HSP Funded
Research – general
- What will the results be used for?
- Will funding be dependent on results?
- Analysis of work being done by DWP & Basic Skills Agency
- Development of baseline costs

Research - current training/support
- What is currently being used?
- How effective is it – are measurements used?
- Have employers been involved in design/delivery?
- Can this be adapted to fit current model – best practice?
- How far is this determined by various funding bodies – e.g. number of hours/timing/outcomes?
- Accreditation routes

Research – other funding bodies
- Do they use any measurement tools?
- How effective are they?
- Could they be adapted for use in Hackney (e.g. OSW)?

Engaging employers
- What do employers want/need?
- Changing needs – predicting future needs

Designing soft skills curriculum
- Length of programme
- Different programmes for different client groups/ages/vocational choices
- Who delivers programme – qualifications/experience?

Designing measurement tool
- Format of tool
- Facilitation and methodology
- Computer format in standard packages
- When will it be used?
- Who should use it?

Piloting tool
- Recruiting training providers
- Short pilots
- Different types of providers
- Brief evaluation

Evaluation of training programme & measurement tool
- Independent concurrent internal evaluation
- Client perspective
- Employer feedback
- Provider perspective
- Results
- Potential for use by other funding bodies
We agreed to provide the following outputs:

- 1 research report (including internal evaluation findings)
- 1 soft skills measurement tool (paper and electronic formats)
- unit cost per client for soft skills

This document is the research report, including the internal evaluation and incorporates the unit costs per clients for soft skills measurement tools.

**Measurement tool and training**

The tool would be designed to measure the distance travelled in the learning and development of individual clients in soft skills areas important to employers and to gaining employment to ensure relevance for the client in their job seeking activity. Soft skills are not learned in a linear and progressive fashion and the tool had to ensure that measurement of skills development could be captured across the full spectrum of skill areas.

The tool had to be ‘user friendly’ both for clients (visually appealing, easy to use with low levels of basic skills) and for organisations administering the tool but with enough rigour to ensure that teaching professionals would have confidence in the representation of their client’s progress. In order to ensure that large and small organisations could have access to the tool it would be developed as an easy to photocopy paper based tool and as an electronic tool using standard computer packages.

This report will go into detail about the development and testing of the tool. It was tested on 78 clients from 6 training organisations covering a wide spectrum of learning and need. Each organisation received training on the use of the tool, which included looking at how the tool could be used for action planning with clients.

The evaluation of this project covered the design and ease of use of the tool, how clients were able to use the tool and the feedback from organisations on the administration and robustness of the tool. Alongside this we conducted research on other available tools and the cost of using these.

**Costs**

Part of the research and development of the tool was to determine the cost of measuring distance travelled. Any activity will have a cost to the organisation: directly or indirectly in time spent. The team looked at the initial start up costs and recurring costs of softer skills measurement tools and the tool under development for this project. Cost effectiveness is of prime concern for any instrument that requires a public funding commitment.

The start up costs for the tools looked at ranged from £3k to £4k for an average group of 10. The recurring costs ranged from £1.5k to £2k. Higher costs exist where computer package licences are required and where on-going training and facilitation are recommended. The commercially available Rickter Scale costs £2322 for start up and has a recurring cost of £1515. This is tool does not explicitly work with employability measures and there would be costs in adapting this. The draft tool developed for this project, *Life Skills, Work Skills*, is estimated to cost £3580 to set up with a recurring cost of £1950.
Key Findings

- There are many assessment tools, aimed particularly at young people, designed to work through the acquisition of a range of life skills, including elements of employability.

- The skills required for successful transition by young people into adulthood has long been the subject of scrutiny and assessment, there has been little practice in the assessment of adults and a consistent lack of information.

- There is no one ‘off-the-shelf’ tool available that meets the requirements for softer skills measurement for employability, despite the fact that increasing employment prospects is a key objective for organisations developing and using such tools.

- Whilst there is a lot of measuring going on it is not always clear what this tells us, particularly in relation to development of suitable curricula for employability. There is a need to link the implementation of assessment of softer skills for employment with developments within organisations to establish appropriate learning in the courses offered.

- Successful tools need to measure attitudinal changes such as self-esteem. Whereas there is a considerable history and acceptance in this area, in the field of psychological assessment, it has barely been developed in other areas and indeed there is evidence of scepticism as to the validity and use of such measures. The credibility of any assessment tool is key to its success.

- Good practice guidance currently encourages projects to develop or adapt tools for ‘local’ use, adding to the considerable variety of assessments being used and the proliferation of the understanding that a standard assessment could not be developed.

- A clear, agreed, common definition of softer skills for employability would help in promoting rigorous assessment of those skills for a wider section of learners, whilst also acknowledging that the route to acquisition of the skills may be different for different groups.

- Where other assessment tools have been developed elsewhere there is significant evidence that their use is not taken up, and they remain on a shelf unless they have a commercial use. If this is to be avoided here, there is the need for a development phase to the project, designed to work with organisations to fully implement assessment of softer skills in their practice and to develop a curricula response to the needs of their client groups. Simply making the tool available is a high-risk strategy for implementation.

- There is a need for greater understanding of the role softer skills play in employability, alongside job specific skills such as IT knowledge. The introduction of assessment can result in a heightened awareness of the need clients have for these skills, but this cannot be assumed at the outset.

- It has been clearly stated that no one tool was identified by the research, however the assumption should not be made that no assessment of softer skills is being undertaken. Most organisations will be keeping detailed records of progress of their clients. For each organisation implementing a formal assessment of soft skills there
will need to be a process of integrating this into current practice and informing their current assessment procedure, if efforts are not to be duplicated

- While self administered assessment tools provide the most economical option it is clear from our work that the most reliable results for the client groups identified will be obtained through a facilitated tool. Further advantages of this approach emerged, particularly in its contribution to working up of individual action plans with clients and the improvement of management information

- For distance travelled to be reliably measured and the effect of the intervention offered by the project assessed then the time between testing must be sufficient for the client to have benefited from the learning and their behaviour and attitudes changed

- Distance travelled in acquiring softer skills is not a linear process, nor is it always a continuum. There is evidence that for some clients the results of a baseline test can include an overoptimistic appraisal of their skills. As self awareness and knowledge of what is required grows then a more realistic second test can appear to register a lowering of skills. This suggests that more frequent application of assessment (rather than beginning and end of courses) would give more reliable results. Self awareness is recognised as a skill

- The pilot phase demonstrated that assessment of softer skills will raise different issues for different client groups. Progress in acquiring skills will differ between client groups and indeed individuals, irrespective of the quality of the training on offer, thus making comparison between organisations invalid

- Literature from funding organisations shows a desire to be better able to demonstrate that their funds are contributing to real change. Further discussions will be required with funding bodies as to how the information gained could be used and interpreted would be imperative if the assessment tool is widely implemented

- Every effort was made to design and pilot a tool that would have wide applicability. However for some groups it did not work for a number of reasons and further detailed work would be required to enable assessment to be implemented for these groups eg special needs, English as a second language
SECTION 2: CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

2.a. The importance of ‘softer skills’ within the employment market

A major premise of the research was that employers value and appreciate softer skills, albeit informally. One of the main reasons for developing a tool to assess an individual’s softer skills is, therefore, to make that individual more employable within the current and future job market.

The research tested this premise by examining current research and trends in the employment market. In doing so, it sought to pin down which softer skills were particularly valued by employers. Only by having a better understanding of what employers want and need are we able to define the ‘end point’ of the distance to be travelled by an individual in relation to their softer skills. The standards and requirements of employers will establish, in other words, what the focus and optimum end of any assessment scale should be.

The research focussed on the following areas:

i. Which softer skills do employers value when recruiting?

ii. How do employers assess these skills?

iii. Future trends in employer demands for softer skills

i. Softer Skills which are valued by employers

“There has been broad agreement that all …. people need a set of personal attributes and skills that will prepare them for both employment and further learning. What has been less clear is the growing confusion over what is meant by generic skills, key competencies, enterprising skills, and the list goes on……Employers were also giving mixed messages about what they meant in this area.”

Australian Chamber of Commerce

There is much evidence to show that employers assess potential employees on the basis of their 'softer skills'. Research and interest in this area has been burgeoning over the last few years, as evidenced by the increasing number of papers and research projects dealing with this subject in the UK and overseas.

Government strategies worldwide

Internationally, there is a growing consensus that softer skills (sometimes referred to as 'lifeskills', 'essential skills', 'generic skills' or 'employability skills') are of central importance in determining both the employability of an individual and the productivity and health of a business enterprise. There are numerous examples of government departments around the world addressing the concept of softer skills, and highlighting these in their work or employment strategies for their country.

The Government of British Columbia, for example, in its Ministry of Education website, makes specific reference to the skills which individuals need in order to gain employment. It divides these up into four categories: Employability skills, Business Skills, Essential Skills and Life/Work skills. The latter two – Essential Skills and Life/Work skills, are the subject of extensive strategies within the country undertaken by specific government departments.
Under the heading of ‘Life/Work Skills’, the government has designed a ‘Blueprint for Life/Work’ that outlines which competencies are required to enhance an individual’s career and life prospects.

Australia similarly has a number of initiatives acknowledging the importance of basic skills. The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) and the Business Council of Australia (BCA) completed a major exercise to discover what employers really look for in their workers to meet their current and future skills needs. The result of this has been the development of an ‘Employability Skills Framework’, intended for broad use with ‘teachers and training providers, job seekers, employees and recruiters and HR professionals’. The framework sets out an interesting and comprehensive resume of skills, dividing these into ‘Personal Attributes that contribute to overall employability’ and ‘Skills’ as follows:

**“Personal attributes that contribute to overall employability**
Loyalty; Commitment; Honesty and Integrity; Enthusiasm; Reliability; Personal Presentation; Common Sense; Positive Self Esteem; A sense of humour; A balanced attitude to work and home life; An ability to deal with pressure; Motivation; Adaptability.

**Skills**
- **Communication** that contributes to productive and harmonious relations across employees and customers
- **Team work** that contributes to productive working relationships and outcomes
- **Problem solving** that contributes to productive outcomes
- **Self Management** that contributes to employee satisfaction and growth
- **Planning and organising** that contributes to long and short term strategic planning
- **Technology** that contributes to effective execution of tasks
- **Learning** that contributes to ongoing improvement and expansion in employee and company operations and outcomes

**Initiative and enterprise** that contribute to innovative outcomes”

From ‘Employability Skills Framework, ACCI’

There is similarly a plethora of information from the United States. The Welfare Information Network, for example, has done research on ‘Softer skills for workforce readiness’. In doing this it has conducted large-scale surveys of employers, and confirms that softer skills are of paramount importance when recruiting for jobs.

“Surveys of employers who hire entry-level workers reveal how important it is for job candidates to have soft skills. In Job Prospects for Welfare Recipients: Employers Speak Out, researchers found that a positive attitude and reliability are the two qualities that employers identify as most important when hiring someone for entry-level work” (Regenstein et al., July 1998). Problems with interpersonal and other soft skills are a major barrier to employment that employers do not believe they can address on their own”.


Closer to home, the Welsh Assembly government has produced an Acton Plan (2001) which focuses on developing the skills of the Welsh workforce. This Action Plan notes that there is
a need to develop evidence of what employers want and need, but notes that basic and employability skills are going to be key in ensuring a productive economy and a skilled workforce. The Action Plan notes that it needs:

“..more in depth and sophisticated research under the Future Skills Wales banner into what employers are really looking for and how they develop the skills of their workforce, including basic, generic and vocational skills…..Future Skills Wales to include this in its next major survey in 2003” (Note: not yet published)

The point about all these initiatives worldwide, and there are many others, is that the profiling of ‘generic’ or ‘employability’ skills has gained weight and momentum throughout certainly the developed world, and government departments are at varying stages of trying to define and strategise around skills development in this area. What is of particular note is the variety of frameworks under development (which, though all deal with the same softer skills areas, differ in their presentation) and the acknowledged need to further consult with employers about precisely what they want.

In England, similar work is underway. In 2000 the Institute for Employment Studies produced a report, ‘Guide to Measuring Soft Outcomes and Distance Travelled’ for the DfES. Notable in the report is firstly the acknowledgement of the importance of softer skills, but then an accompanying acknowledgement that these skills are difficult to pin down and assess.

More recently the National Employers Skills Survey 2003 has been produced. This piece of work was commissioned by the Learning and Skills Council with the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). It provides information about the extent, causes and implications of England’s recruitment problems and skills gaps. It forms part of a longer series of surveys starting with Skill Needs in Britain (1990 – 1998) and followed by the Skill Surveys in 1999, 2001 and 2002.

The National Employer Skills Survey (NESS 2003) provides detailed regional and sector analysis, and provides us with the most comprehensive information on employer experience and needs, involving as it has 72,100 interviews with representative employers in England. Most relevant to this research is the analysis of skills gaps provided by the survey. It notes that, whilst recruitment problems may be regionally varied, the presence of skills gaps is not, with most sectors reporting skills gaps at around the level reported nationally. The survey notes that:

“The key areas in which employees were viewed as lacking skills can be classified as relatively soft skills areas: Communication (61%); Customer handling (55%); Team Working (52%) and Problem-solving (47%)”

In all the strategies pertinent to the UK, the notion of Key Skills, originally developed by the National Council of Vocational Qualifications, is picked up in a number of consultation documents, research reports and policy guidance. The six key areas are:

- Communication
- Application of Number
- Information Technology
- Working with others
- Improving own Learning and Performance
- Problem Solving
It will be seen from this list that several of these skills are ‘soft’. They have been identified as a framework for assessing the general skills which are most relevant to employment. A number of government consultation documents emphasise the need for these skills to be taught alongside other, more specialised vocational qualifications.

**Employer research**

Aside from the national surveys, there are a number of research initiatives which similarly show the importance of softer skills. The Institute of Employment Studies (IES) has a large number of relevant research papers on the issue which chart the emergent importance of softer skills when thinking about the development of the UK’s workforce.

A 1998 research publication sets out the issues around this. ‘Employability: developing a framework for policy analysis’ was published by the IES for the DfES. In this, it notes that government policy is aimed:

“*more at the development and accreditation of knowledge and vocation than at the ‘softer’ skills and attitudes*”.

The report notes that a combination of factors are needed in order to measure and enhance somebody’s ‘employability’. The elements of this are fourfold: Assets (including baseline assets such as basic skills and essential personal attributes); Deployment (the possession of abilities which include career management and job search skills); Presentation (the ability to demonstrate one’s employability, including the importance of personal presentation) and Personal Circumstances (such as caring responsibilities, disabilities).

Further research has done nothing but reinforce the importance of softer skills. Much of this research draws attention to the fact that, whilst ‘softer skills’ may be of critical importance, employer awareness of these is often vague and certainly not often linked to definitions provided by research or government departments. For example, ‘Employers Perceptions of Key Skills’, also published in 1998, notes that the concept of Key Skills is only partly known by employers and virtually none of those surveyed could name what they were. Employers particularly rated the following key skills:

- Working in a Team
- Learning
- Oral Communication

with lesser though significant importance being attached to written skills. However, though they considered these important, the means of defining and assessing these was, for most, not clear.

**Sector-specific initiatives**

Sector-specific research also, increasingly, shows that the significant gaps in skills are around the softer skills areas. ‘An Assessment of Skill Needs in Post-16 Education and Training’, by the IES, is an analysis of the most up-to-date information about skills issues in one particular sector - the post-16 education and training sector. This notes that the skills which are most difficult to obtain are predominantly:

“*general, technical and practical skills, advanced IT skills, communication skills and management skills*”. 
The importance of the basic communication skills, even in this comparatively skilled sector, is emphasised and their current deficit noted. Other research on sector skills deficits reinforce this message.

The Sector Skills Development Agency formally came into operation in April 2002. One of its stated aims is to ensure that 'skills provision is designed to meet sector needs'. Sector Skills Councils have been formed in parallel with this agency, working under a licence issued by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills and the Lifelong Learning Ministers in the devolved administrations.

This recent initiative has led to the move towards developing a single framework of sectors and subjects across relevant education agencies and departments in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In developing this framework, the SSDA is coming up with a number of frameworks, including the 'Framework for preparation for life and work'. Though still being drawn up, the indicative content of this reveals that softer skills form the most important part of any future curriculum and qualifications.

Direct evidence from employers

Whilst there are a vast number of research initiatives exploring the needs of employers, employers themselves are also taking matters into their own hands and seeking to identify and develop their skills base. The journals and sector-specific development agencies similarly demonstrate a growing concern and awareness with softer skills, and their fundamental importance in recruiting a productive workforce.

The over-arching point here is that there is a move at all levels of employment towards the appreciation of softer skills within the job market. Thus, though the adult learning providers may often be focusing on those with multiple barriers to employment at present, it is worth noting that a focus on softer skills is consistent with overall trends in the job market at all levels. For those progressing through training to jobs and promotion, therefore, a focus on softer skills at an early stage should help if and when they end up occupying more senior, responsible positions.

For example, there are several discussion boards and exploratory pieces of research on developing softer skills amongst IT professionals. It would appear that, following the initial market need for people with 'hard' skills in computing, data programming etc., the job market in this area has now matured. This means that there is a growing awareness that efficiency, employee retention and business success is also heavily dependent on the degree to which individuals are able to show communication, team-building, cultural sensitivity and other, less tangible attributes. In other words, the importance of softer skills is overtly, and increasingly, recognised.

Other specialist professions are also demonstrating an awareness of the importance of softer skills. The Journal of Accountancy ran an article ('Looking Hard for Softer Skills', February 2002) which showed that, of the 1,400 Chief Finance Officers surveyed, ‘interpersonal skills’ was the single largest element in their decision to hire or not. 26% of their assessment of whether to hire or not was based on these skills, as opposed to only 12% of their decision which was based on ‘technical knowledge’. Other categories consisted of: Years of Experience; Work Experience and Previous Accomplishments.

Business Week (a US publication) ran an article on April 10th 2001 called 'Focusing on the Softer Side of Management'. In this, it specifically notes the move from a traditional, monitoring and disciplinary form of management towards an increasing appreciation of 'softer skills' within senior level employees. A survey of 721 companies in 1998 revealed that the
‘success’ of senior employees was assessed primarily on financial profit returns – by 2001, only 43% of the same companies were assessing their senior employees on profit only, with a large proportion now taking into account the interpersonal skills they demonstrated. A specific example of a large construction company demonstrates the point, and shows a dramatic change in their way of working and assessing employee performance.

Career Advice

A final source of evidence was considered – that of current careers advice. A brief trawl of graduate websites, including University Careers websites, shows that ‘softer skills’ are profiled in all.

As elsewhere, the language used to denote these skills varies. Thus Keel University Students Union discusses ‘Employability Skills’ in some detail, making the connection between these and ‘Key Skills’. As it notes:

“Employability skills’ can also be referred to as ‘Key Skills’, ‘Transferable Skills’ or ‘Generic Skills. They can be defined as skills that can be utilised over a wide variety of tasks/situations within all degree subjects, jobs and life experiences.’

During the course of studying at Keele, students are expected to develop these key skills to a more advanced level (Qualifications & Curriculum Authority, QCA Key Skills Level 4). The point here is, however, that Keele, in common with other student advice networks, is emphasising to students the importance of both acknowledging and consciously developing their lifeskills, and not just their academic or technical abilities.

A similar message is gleaned from commercial careers advice networks. Monster Career Advice, for example, emphasises the importance of certain Job Skills for all, which include the capacity to problem-solve and develop human relations. With Monster as with other recruitment and careers agencies, the importance of softer skills is emphasised in the same way that it is in government strategies, research, and by employers themselves.

ii. How do employers assess the softer skills they require?

Whilst there may be a considerable degree of agreement on the fact that softer skills are important, there is a wide diversity of approach in either defining or measuring these skills amongst employers.

Firstly, the number of definitions deployed by government departments and others can create, in and of itself, a difficulty. Employers surveyed showed varying degrees of awareness of the language used to define this area by policy makers. The wide number of skills definitions available certainly do not help provide a clear assessment framework, including as they do all or more of the skills outlined in the indicative content of the QCA of its ‘Framework for preparation for life and work NVQs in developing and extending knowledge and skill’.

• Basic/Essential Skills
• Key Skills
• Learning Skills
• Life Skills
• Personal Development
• Employability Skills
• Job Seeking Skills
Given the confusion in this area, employers are likely to recognise what they mean by ‘softer skills’ and assess these in a fairly arbitrary fashion. This is backed up by research on employer assessment. ‘Developing the Key Skills of Young People’, for example, was a study in Avon in 1998. It surveyed a number of employers, and found that, whilst they were keen on the presence of key skills in theory, in practice they had few objective criteria for assessing these. The research noted that it is difficult to assess the more personal and interpersonal elements of key skills, and that more work needs to be done in this area.

Sector-specific information points towards a growing awareness of the need to assess ‘softer skills’. e-skills UK (Skills for Business) outlines the large matrix of skills which the IT industry is looking for, for example. Half of these are softer skills around interpersonal and communication and team working. It provides a section, on its website, for ‘Competency Definition and Indicators’, and seeks to identify practical ways in which personal and interpersonal skills can be judged and assessed. However, this level of skills analysis is detailed, and demands a close examination of the candidates in working situations – in this sense it is more applicable to existing employees than new recruits. It is also, obviously, for an industry where a high level of performance and specialism is expected.

At the more basic skills end of the spectrum, there would seem to be a much less rigorous attempt to assess softer skills. There are several problems here. Firstly, there is the problem of definition already noted. Secondly, there is the difficulty of employer awareness of such competencies as ‘skills’, rather than innate characteristics. Thirdly, there is the problem of time and employer competence in either defining or assessing the skills of potential candidates.

Interestingly (though perhaps not surprisingly) there seems to be a correlation between an employer’s capacity to ‘fairly’ recruit and assess softer skills, and its preparedness to develop training programmes for its workforce around such skills as assertiveness. Agencies which participate, for example, in ‘back to work’ schemes for the long-term unemployed seem to have an increased awareness that interpersonal skills can be learned, and may only be temporarily lacking in candidates because their confidence has been eroded during their long-term unemployment. A case study on Tesco, for example, showed that this employer ran training programmes in house in order to compensate for skills deficits in this area, as a result of which their retention rates and workforce morale were increased.

Such schemes, and such employer awareness, means that the barrier created by the absence of softer skills is more equitably dealt with, as an area for improvement, rather than being regarded as an innate defect and the applicant dismissed out of hand.

Elsewhere, however, and particularly amongst the smaller employers, the message around softer skills is clear: they are regarded as vital, and form the basis of the critical decisions particularly at the less skilled end of the workforce spectrum, whilst simultaneously being difficult to define or assess in any standard way.

As part of the research the project team sent a mystery shopper to test whether temporary employment agencies were testing for softer skills. This may be a route to employment for some clients in training provision. Conversely, the three agencies visited, one a leading ‘high street’ brand, concentrated on track record and references available rather than carrying out any formal testing of potential placements.
iii. Future trends in employer demands for softer skills

The research outlined in Section 2.a.i outlines in detail the current importance of softer skills. All evidence and information points to the fact that this is on the increase.

Softer skills have always been important. The ability to present and interact with others has, in the past, formed part at least of the way in which employers have assessed and recruited their workforce, albeit in an unacknowledged fashion.

There are two major factors which are lending increasing weight to the importance of softer skills within the workforce in the 21st Century, however.

The first of these is the changing face of employment. The decline of manufacturing industries, and the growth of the creative, tourist and other communication-based industries, is one of the many reasons why softer skills are coming to the fore of research in this area. Such industries demand softer skills across a wide range of their employees.

The second point is a shift in culture from that of 'traditional' management systems to those which support and seek to develop not only the technical but also the personal and 'softer' skills of their employees. As research into employers showed, many companies are abandoning their traditional methods of employee monitoring and management for more inclusive, supportive methods which reap, in the long term, high rewards in terms of employee retention, commitment and productivity.

The most recent skills survey in England found that the most significant gap for employers was around softer skills. Whether this be a product of increased employer awareness or changes in the types of employment on offer, the fact still remains that softer skills are now and will continue to be of significant importance.

Summary of key points from employer research:

- There is a wide variety of research showing that softer skills are important to employers, governments and sectors
- There is no standard definition of what these softer skills are, and definitions created by accreditation or policy making agencies have no common currency amongst employers
- Employers do not assess softer skills in any standard fashion, and are often likely to regard them as 'innate' rather than 'acquired' characteristics
- Softer skills are going to continue to be important into the future given developments in the labour market and changing employment practice.

2.b. Potential Benefits and Beneficiaries of a measurement tool

The aim of the research project was to look at the desirability and viability of creating a Softer Skills Assessment Tool for those in adult learning. This could potentially be used in a number of training settings, offering services to a wide range of participants.

Given the evidence that employers place a great deal of importance on softer skills, and given also that most current qualifications do not offer an appropriate method of measuring
‘softer skill progress’ towards employability, it was apparent that there could be several key benefits of developing such a softer skills assessment tool. These included:

**Potential benefits for employers**

It is important to note that employers do, already, place value on a number of well-established qualifications and assessments. Any new assessment tool would not be designed to replace these.

However, it is also important to note that the softer skills valued by many potential employers are not properly tested through the mainstream qualifications. As a result, such qualifications do not provide evidence of ‘competence’ in such areas as positive attitudes to work, and timekeeping. These areas, as summarised in Section 2.a., are vital to employers. The development of a softer skills assessment tool could therefore provide employers with evidence that an individual met certain standards in relation to softer skills, and therefore certain basic criteria for employability.

Though this sounds straightforward in theory, the benefits for employers are unlikely to be that direct, for a number of reasons. Employer research reveals that most employers have complex attitudes towards softer skills. Though they appreciate (and indeed require) softer skills in their workforce, there is no regularly applied method for acknowledging and assessing them. Furthermore, it is doubtful if many employers would lend weight to a certificate for the level of softer skills which such a tool would measure. Research (and common sense) shows that employers are much more likely to want to assess such skills for themselves, rather than trust an external qualification as ‘proof’ of competence in these areas.

At the more specialised end of the job market, for higher-earning, more responsible posts, softer skills are likely to be assessed in a variety of ways throughout the more rigorous recruitment procedures associated with such positions. Applicants will find their presentation skills, communication skills and team-building skills considered as part of a more comprehensive recruitment/assessment process. In other words, softer skills have been incorporated into an overall assessment.

However, at the less specialised and lower-earning end of the job market, softer skills are likely to be judged in far less formal or overt ways. The time taken to assess applicants for such posts is generally less, and thus the assessment of candidates’ softer skills is likely to occur in a more impressionistic and rapid fashion. Paradoxically, softer skills are often of paramount importance in such non-specialised posts.

It should be noticed that the difference between the two approaches rests to a large degree on the extent to which factors such as confidence, assertiveness and personal presentation are acknowledged as skills (which can be acquired) rather than personal attributes (which cannot). If an employer views softer skills as innate, personal attributes then they are less likely to be prepared either to train around their development, or to give weight to qualifications which show improvements in these areas.

For these and other reasons, it is unlikely that the existence of a softer skills measurement tool would have a direct and immediate benefit to employers. The benefit is likely to be more indirect, as the workforce gains both awareness of and competence in the softer skills areas which employers say they value.
Potential benefits for training providers

For those providing training to adults on a wide range of courses, the potential benefits of a softer skills measurement tool are great. Currently such training providers are unable to measure the positive outcomes of training courses if and when subject-based qualifications are not achieved. A participant may attend a course, make significant progress towards employment, and yet not ‘count’ as a successful training intervention if they fail to achieve a final certification.

Furthermore, many training organisations are well aware that they need to progress clients in relation to their softer skills without, at present, having a clear framework for so doing. Many strands of programmes designed to improve ‘employability’ are concerned with the improvement of softer skills, without at present being able to demonstrate an objective improvement.

The key benefits for training providers working with largely unemployed clients are likely to be threefold:

- They will be able to show funders and other stakeholders that the training they offer is successful in moving participants towards employability
- They will be able to increase the awareness of their course participants around the nature and level of softer skills needed in order to be successful in the labour market.
- They will be able to design and tailor their courses to meet the needs of their participants more closely.

Potential target beneficiaries

The original aim of the project was to create an assessment tool which would be applicable in a wide variety of training settings, offering services to a wide range of participants. It was clear that the assessment tool should be targeted at those people who could not or did not demonstrate their learning or progress through the ‘established’ qualification and testing routes, particularly in relation to the softer skills necessary for employment.

However, given the plethora of training courses offered within adult education, and the wide variety of abilities and interests of those in training, it was important to assess which types of people, in which types of settings, would most benefit from the introduction of a softer skills measurement tool. Would such a tool be beneficial for all, or would it be more use to some groups than others?

Part of the project’s consideration of this was through the direct testing of the draft measurement tool developed. There was some potential, during the trial period, to assess its uses for different types of client groups. In addition, the project team considered research evidence in this area.

Through this, it became clear that to understand who could most benefit from the creation and introduction of such a measurement tool required an understanding of its potential uses. A measurement tool of this nature has, obviously, the capacity to measure progress, but it has several other potential functions which will indicate its primary beneficiaries, including:
• the potential to act as an interactive teaching tool around softer skills and 'employability'

• the potential to motivate individuals who may not be achieving 'traditional' qualifications

• the potential to introduce a level of self-awareness to individuals around the softer skills necessary for both personal and professional development

Given all of these, it was felt that its applicability could be wide. Critical to its success, however, would be the degree to which the training provider used the measurement tool in order to facilitate discussion with clients. A high level of facilitation would enable some benefit to be gained even by clients with severe barriers to learning, but a low level of facilitation could result in little gain for such groups. Equally, the tool could be used with those with low skills as part of the course curriculum and thus raise the issues around the softer skills needed to succeed in seeking employment, embedding this into literacy, numeracy and ESOL teaching.

Broadly, the project team identified that the key target group for such a measurement tool was the unemployed between the broad age ranges of 16-50. Those who would particularly benefit within this group would be:

• Those in a training or education setting for whom success in publicly recognised qualifications is unlikely or is not likely within the timescale of the training or education course

• Those who have been unsuccessful in the labour market or are about to enter the labour market for the first time

• Young people – in order to broaden their skill base and compete more effectively in the job market

• Those in training who are not ready to acquire qualifications or employment for a range of reasons

• Those who are hard to engage in learning

• Those with low levels of basic skills

• Those without previous experience of success in learning or work
SECTION 3: EXISTING ACTIVITY

There is much work being done under the broad umbrella of ‘measuring distance travelled’, in educational and other fields. This section summarises the broad range of such activities and the lessons to be gained from these.

3.a. Research and Development on Softer Skills Measurements

There has been considerable work undertaken to try and define the intangible benefits of a wide variety of interventions. These interventions may be educational, or geared to a person’s health or social well-being in the broadest sense. Such benefits are often defined as ‘soft outcomes’, and alongside the attempt to define what these may be there has been much debate and research on how we can measure an individual’s progress towards these outcomes. This is often referred to as the ‘distance travelled’.

This section gives an overview of the issues raised by research and development in this area. This research provided the project team with a context against which the tool could be both developed and assessed.

Educational Research and Development

The need to recognise and measure the softer outcomes of training and education has been recognised for some time, as has the need to try and quantify ‘distance travelled’ in relation to these outcomes. The desirability and viability of developing such a measurement tool has provoked debate amongst training providers and educationalists, funders and other stakeholders.

In the past, many training programmes have measured their success through the attainment of hard quantifiable outputs, whether or not these were relevant to the objectives of the education or training. Examples of these outputs are:

- Numbers succeeding in gaining a formal and publicly recognised qualification
- Numbers of participants obtaining employment
- Number of participants completing a course

In recent years, and partly sparked by the debates, there has been increasing challenge to the sole use of hard outcomes for a number of reasons:

Validity of the evidence. These outputs may not be directly related to the objectives of the programme e.g. obtaining a qualification is not an indicator of employment, or short-term employment is not an indicator that a participant is securely in the labour market. For example, there is much anecdotal evidence of people becoming ‘serial’ participants in training programmes, leaving each as a successful output.

Relevance of evidence. A sound knowledge of industry specific technical knowledge is of undisputed value in the labour market, and there are key skills including literacy, numeracy and a command of English that are highly important for success in employment. However, there has been increasing recognition in all education sectors that there are a number of other skills which employers’ value.

Lack of recognition of change. The literature available shows an increasing concern that change or ‘distance travelled’ be recognised particularly for those for whom formal
qualifications are either not achievable or not yet achievable. Trainers report a range of changes which represent significant progress but which formal tests have not identified or measured, e.g. gains in confidence and reliability.

**Where hard outcomes are inappropriate.** For some programmes the work legitimately does not include hard outcomes such as gaining employment or a further training place, but progress towards these goals will have been made, e.g. introductory, taster and short courses.

However, there has been a reluctance to shift the balance between hard and soft outcomes in measuring success. This stems in part from the fact that soft outcomes are less easy to measure, and often involve subjective and qualitative assessments. This is truer for some than others – for example, punctuality and good attendance records are readily recorded and easily quantifiable. However, skills required in team working or the measurement of increased confidence are less easy to either define or measure.

Educationalists have long offered qualitative measures for this progress but for most these measures are at best considered as ancillary to the hard outcomes and at worst dismissed as too nebulous or window dressing. In recent years, however, there has been more detailed work undertaken on the need to examine ways of capturing these ‘soft outcomes’. This has been driven by a number of factors:

- Interest from government departments and statutory agencies which recognise that these softer skills are often vital within the context of employment
- Interest from funding bodies which wish to understand and demonstrate the outcomes of their funding in a more comprehensive manner
- Interest from training providers wishing to demonstrate the achievements of their programmes in alternative ways than by achieving the traditional ‘hard’ outcomes
- Interest within the sectors working with disadvantaged groups which increasingly need to demonstrate their effectiveness in a credible way, with evidence based approaches.

The attempt to clarify and collect good and reliable evidence about the progress of participants and the effectiveness of work has thus become a high profile issue.

We researched the development of both theory and practice in this area. In searching for an existing tool to measure softer outcomes, we were looking for something which could measure progress in a variety of settings, for a wide range of groups with differing abilities and training needs. It would also have to be sensitive to relatively small changes.

An overarching finding of our research was that there is a proliferation of assessment instruments under development, in use and/or commercially available. In spite of this, (or perhaps because of this) there are no generally accepted standards, or common agreements on what the key skills or areas to measure are.

This signals a danger in that there is a wide range of design, cost and complexity in the tools available. While there is a great deal of measuring going on it does not always tell us what we want to know.

**Health and Social Care Research and Development**

The area of health and social care is vast, and internationally there has been a wide-ranging debate on a number of issues to do with measuring health outcomes. Even a brief trawl of
the internet reveals an enormous number of research papers, institutes and initiatives concerned, in one form or other, with examining the outcomes of health and social care, and measuring improvements in these.

Given the diversity of research and discussion in this area, it was important to limit this review only to sections which could provide lessons for the development of a softer skills assessment tool. Research in this area happens for a wide variety of reasons, including:

- **The need to establish baseline information to assess the impact of a nation’s health programmes.** Such research aims to assess social indicators of e.g. poverty in order to establish the relative success of different health interventions, within the UK and elsewhere.

- **The need to establish clinical efficiency in relation to individual health.** A vast amount of the work undertaken in this area is about establishing whether often expensive clinical interventions are justifiable in public health terms. Such research and assessments, closely linked as they are to an economic model of efficiency and progress, seek to define health from an objective standpoint in order to then assess the impact of any intervention comparative to any other. Critically, this work will focus on assessing the process of delivering an intervention (thus providing, in many instances, effectively a management tool) whilst assessing ‘health improvement’ in often ‘hard’ terms, where benefits are observable.

- **The need to prove the impact of social interventions in terms of community or individual health/well-being.** Many agencies, particularly those from the voluntary sector concerned with delivering support and advice, are aware that the benefits they deliver are around self-esteem, empowerment or other softer skills. However, they are unable to quantify this. Advice services, for example, deliver a measurable outcome of ‘hard’ advice (resulting in increased knowledge and ability to solve a problem) but they may also result in an improvement in somebody’s well-being by, for example, reducing stress or isolation, or increasing confidence.

- **The need to establish a patient-centred method of assessing improvements in health and well-being.** ‘Patient-based outcome measures’ address constructs such as health-related quality of life, subjective health status and functional status of an individual

It is this latter category which provided most insights into means of defining the softer measures of health and well-being, and ways of assessing progress towards these. Even limiting ourselves to patient-based outcome measures, however, reveals that the range of such tools is substantial. The common denominator of all tools considered relevant to this review is that they address some aspect of the patient’s subjective experience of health and the consequences of illness. Drawing on lessons gained from the use and evaluation of such tools by such bodies as the Health Technology Assessment (a research body for the NHS), we found that, as with educational measurement tools, there were some key criteria for establishing whether or not such tools would be effective. These eight criteria are:

- **Appropriateness:** Is the content of the instrument appropriate to the questions which the clinical trial is intended to address?

- **Acceptability:** Is the instrument acceptable to patients?

- **Feasibility:** Is the instrument easy to administer and process?
• **Interpretability**: How interpretable are the scores of the instrument?

• **Precision**: How precise are the scores of the instrument?

• **Reliability**: Does the instrument produce results that are reproducible and internally consistent?

• **Validity**: Does the instrument measure what it claims to measure?

• **Responsiveness**: Does the instrument detect changes over time that matter to patients?

It can be seen from the above list that these broad criteria have lessons for the development of any individual assessment, including that of softer skills.

**World Database of Happiness**

This largely academic but comprehensive database is run from Erasmus University in Holland. It collects and lists publications dealing with all aspects of defining, measuring, validating and recording the concept of human happiness.

No assessment tool was immediately apparent, from an initial trawl of the thousands of publications listed. There was, however, significant discussion about the nature of happiness indicators and their validity. Much of this is highly detailed discussion on the possibility or relevance of varying social research methodologies.

**Summary of Key Research and Development on Measuring Softer Outcomes**

**The Education Literature Review**

This review examined the debates and developments on thinking about and assessing the ‘distance travelled’. Much of this debate has been initiated by funders. The research looked at four high profile funders, the research and guidance that they have provided towards the debate and examined the assessment tools emerging from their work.

**Community Fund (Lottery)**

An overview of the need for measurement of outputs and outcomes was undertaken for the Community Fund by David Carrington. This work reinforced the need for programmes to measure and assess the outcomes and impacts of their work. Using examples from his experience as Director of the Baring Foundation, he stated:

“We were good on amounts and quantity; ....we were very informative about inputs and outputs ....our database and information management systems meant that we could send within a few minutes pie charts and tables (on) .. factual information about what we funded.

But if (they) had asked: What had been the impact of the grant programme? What had been achieved? What had been the difference made to the lives of the 100’s of people that were being assisted? or What had worked and why? I’d have had to resort to anecdote and example”
The paper looks in some detail at the benefits to be gained from measuring and reporting the changes brought about by the work of funded projects to the funders, and in the management of programmes and the consequent improvement of services offered. It suggests there is value in demonstrating to a wider audience, including policy makers, the full range of achievements.

However, though the paper addresses a common dilemma, it offers little advice as to how this might happen. It makes a plea, finally, for some standardisation of terms and methods in defining and assessing outcomes without providing suggestions as to how this may be achieved.

**The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) for the European Social Fund (ESF)**

In 2000 the Institute for Employment Studies produced a report, ‘Guide to Measuring Soft Outcomes and Distance Travelled’ for the DfES, which was aimed at assisting projects and organisations to understand and implement systems for recording soft outcomes and distance travelled. The guide is primarily aimed at those organisations receiving ESF Objective 3 funds but it was felt also to be of interest to those working with groups of people who are some distance from participation in the job market. The clear objective of the document is to assist projects in the design of their own soft outcome monitoring systems.

Though at first sight the guide seemed to cover precisely our area of research, it was clear from the first that significant difficulties had been encountered when trying to measure these. As the provisos set out in the introduction to the guide stated:

“We have presented a range of different activities and options but it is important to recognise that: It is not possible to touch on all the monitoring systems and tools that can be used…. Not all suggestions will be suitable for your particular project. You will have to decide what is most appropriate. Several projects have developed soft outcome systems and some of these are listed…. We encourage the exchange of good practice this way – you can only learn by doing”

In essence this sets out neatly the issues facing the development of an assessment tool and this informed the development phase of this project. There are indeed many different tools and monitoring systems in use and available for purchase. The paper did underline a prevalent view that it is not possible to develop a more universally applicable assessment tool and there is encouragement for each setting to design and implement their own monitoring instrument taking note of practice elsewhere.

This approach has added impetus to the proliferation of individual ‘home grown’ assessment tools and a flourishing commercial market. It also begs the question as to whether it is indeed possible to design a tool that assesses progress towards employability which can cope with different needs and abilities, whilst applying rigour and reliability to what must, in many instances, be subjective judgements.

The guide in line with other literature examines why it is important to measure soft outcomes and distance travelled, and what is meant by the terms used in assessment in order to set an agreed definition. It gives examples of possible indicators of soft skills, looks at establishing a baseline from which to measure distance travelled and considers ways the resulting information can be presented. The indicators it suggests are largely types of evidence which may be collected to support the notion of progress e.g. attendance sheets, but it also concludes that for some areas it may only be possible to record that progress has been made.
In terms of sharing good practice it is indicative of the shifting patterns of funding that of the references in the guide only the commercially available tool (Rickter Scale) remains current.

Connexions Services

The establishment of the Connexions Services in England has added to the focus on measuring distance travelled. One of the underpinning goals of the Connexions Service is to ensure that young people between the ages of 13 and 19 are engaged in education, training or employment.

The Connexions Framework (Assessment, Planning, Implementation & Review (APIR)) states:

“The Connexions Service must be able to demonstrate that it has been successful in supporting young people and helping them to maximise their potential. It is crucial therefore that personal advisers focus on securing measurable outcomes for young people......It is recognised that for some young people with deep-seated problems it will be difficult to identify “hard” measures of progress. In such cases the Connexions Framework provides structure for measuring softer outcomes and the progress made by a young person.”

Within the Framework APIR, which is designed as a guidance for professionals (primarily personal advisers), there is a profiling kit. The kit sets out 18 areas, which make up the profile. However guidance also suggests that other assessment tools and processes may provide evidence for these areas. This is underlined in the report commissioned by Central London Connexions Partnership and the Learning and Skills Council which examines the ways in which APIR have been implemented.

The APIR is seen to be a framework within which a variety of assessment methods may be adopted and used to evidence the 18 areas of the profile, allowing effective planning with young people to ensure their smooth transition to adulthood. Clearly this may also include an element for employment skills, which may inform areas such as:

- Attitude and Motivation
- Aspiration
- Life Skills
- Identity and self image

What becomes clear from the literature emanating from Connexions services nationally is that assessment of the progress of young people in a wide range of areas, not only employability skills, is considered key to success in working towards their vision. This is emphasised on the Humberside Connexions Web site which reviews and evaluates 48 different assessment tools within the resources site.

Neighbourhood Support Fund (NSF)

Introduced as a forerunner to the Connexions Service and now identified as part of the National Connexions profile, the Neighbourhood Support Fund was introduced in 2000 to support young people aged 13-19 years into positive engagement in training, education or employment. The Community Development Foundation (CDF) and the Community Education Development Centre (CEDC, now part of ContinYou) jointly administered part of the fund which in its first phase supported 520 community led projects. The aim was to engage young people in structured activities which would lead them to successfully engage in education, training or employment.
CDF commissioned work on developing the practice of measuring soft outcomes in these settings. A report of a workshop held to explore good practice in this area and issues surrounding assessments, rose to the challenge set out by the Guide produced by the Institute of Employment Studies, that it is not possible to produce a standardised assessment tool which can be used with a wide variety of clients and projects. The report indicates that work can be achieved in the areas of core skills, self-esteem, aspirations and community involvement, of which the first three would have direct relevance to employability.

NSF has now moved into phase two and work continues on the development of an assessment tool for use with this age group. This is considered below (section 3d). However the overall importance of attempting to capture information on progress is set out in the CDF publication, “Moved On”, which sets out good practice in this area, demonstrating the wide variety of approaches which are currently undertaken even within organisations working with a broadly similar group.

The Scottish Executive

In 1999 the Scottish Executive published a report entitled “Implementing Inclusiveness – Realising Potential” (The Beattie Report). This was a wide-ranging examination of the needs of young people who require additional support in transition from school to post-school. It is a comprehensive report with significant recommendations, one being:

“that there should be a review of assessment tools at national level…with particular emphasis on the skills and attributes which contribute to employability.”

Following the report, there was a survey and consultation exercise across all sectors of education in Scotland and a final report on the findings emerged.

Initially, it seemed as if this report might point us towards a tool which could be adapted or transferred. However, much like the Connexions service in England, the research looked to provide a framework for assessment in the widest sense. As a result, a key aspect of the review was the compilation of a digest of assessment tools, the specific focus of which was on the assessment of "soft" skills and employability. The digest has drawn upon tools with a wider and more generic brief but contains information on 51, covering basic skills profiling, core skills, personal effectiveness, personal style, vocational interests and databases, aptitude and abilities, personal development programmes, trainability and work samples, frameworks and curriculum materials. This proved a valuable resource in the more detailed examination of specific tools but the report did not identify or recommend particular instruments. However general recommendations of the report included the following:

“There is the need for staff development in FE focused on the practice of assessing learning and support needs, particularly in the development of "soft" skills. Colleges should consider whether commercially produced tools to assist the assessment and development of "soft" skills might play a part in this process.

Agencies and organisations require advice and support in relation to the assessment of "soft" skills. A clear common definition of what is meant by "soft" skills would be helpful.

There are positive reasons for considering the use of appropriate assessment tools as part of a 1:1 interview. These may be commercially-produced measures, or locally designed techniques or approaches which are tried and tested and are respected by colleagues in other agencies. Benefits might include greater objectivity, increased credibility for the assessment process by funders and more client ownership of the process (if used appropriately).
Staff must be fully trained in all aspects of administering assessment tools and how findings should be recorded, in order to comply with legislation and still serve the best interests of clients. This point also applies to the transfer of information between agencies.

Organisations should consider adopting a common assessment tool (or tools) for the identification of learning and support needs in a locality.

Definitions of "employability" need to be discussed and agreed.

Despite the outcome of the review of assessment in Scotland the original report itself identified difficulties with the piecemeal approach to assessment. This presented a stark warning against the individualised approach to assessment.

“There appeared to be an atmosphere of continual improvement, or dissatisfaction with current tools. An unfortunate consequence was constant change, which led to confusion and lack of standardisation. Duplication of effort resulted as agencies and projects questioned the value and relevance of previous "home-grown" assessments by other organisations and preferred to conduct their own. This contributed to the repetition of assessments, apparently resulting in young people becoming less interested and less engaged in productive involvement with the services and the assessment process.”

This report, in line with other reports, recommended that agencies agree common needs, definitions and philosophy and exhorted them to find the most appropriate assessment tool for their particular organisation. As with other reports, however, it did not identify any particular assessment tool, but just reinforced the general view that to recognise and assess softer skills is desirable, whilst at the same time being a complex process.

National Centre for Health Outcomes

A comprehensive review of patient-centred health outcomes conducted in 1998 trawled a wide variety of assessment tools used in assessing patient health. This research, conducted by Health Technology Assessment, had two main objectives:

“To describe the diversity and reasons for diversity of available patient-based outcome measures

To make clear the criteria investigators should have in mind when they select patient-based outcome measures for inclusion in a clinical trial.”

This research concluded that there was no consistency in the wide variety of tools available to assess patient-orientated health outcomes. Difficulties in reaching a consistent viewpoint included:

- A wide diversity of types of tool employed
- No common understanding of key concepts, definitions and theories of what such instruments measure. For example, there is little consistency of use or agreement as to the meaning of key terms such as ‘quality of life’.
- A wide range of intended purposes and contents of the types of tools available.
The research concluded that both those using and developing the tools needed to make their criteria for choosing one type of tool over another clear, preferably in line with the eight key criteria which emerged during the course of the research.

Importantly for the Unqualified Success research, this review showed that, though there was a good deal of activity in this area, it was happening in a piecemeal and unco-ordinated fashion. This echoed our findings around the educational assessment tools.

**National Institute for Clinical Excellence/Commission for Health Improvement**

These bodies, which have the aim of improving quality within the NHS, are clearly concerned with the assessment of health services. A review of their sites, however, shows that they are primarily concerned with developing models for assessing services. In such models, the patient involvement is that of assessor, not assessed.

**Summary of key points emerging from Unqualified Success review of research:**

- No single measurement tool has emerged which has gained currency as a means of assessing softer skills, and which could offer the ability to track progress of learners in obtaining these skills.

- There is a growing understanding that the traditional input and output method of assessing and evaluating organisational and individual performance is inadequate.

- There is an increasing impatience with the limitations of “hard” output assessment.

- There is a good deal of debate and research around effective assessment of ‘softer’ skills. There is far less evidence of enthusiasm or activity for tackling the development of specific tools.

- Many assessment tools, particularly within the health and social care fields, have the aim of establishing a baseline or snapshot, rather than creating a tool which can, with use over time, measure distance travelled.

- For those patient-centred measurement tools which exist within the health field, there is generally a move to assess.

- Despite the above there is a general call for greater cooperation, common understanding of the issues involved and joint working.

- Much of the literature has looked at the needs of young people and protocols are often worked up solely from the needs of this group.

- Guidance on good practice and the potential benefits of engaging in this area of assessment abounds.

- There has been much written concerning the pitfalls of assessment techniques developed to date, which needs to be taken into account in the design and implementation of any new measurement tools.
3.b. Existing Measurement Tools

In trying to devise an assessment tool for softer skills, we were aware that numerous disciplines had trodden a similar route and considered the issues we were facing. A number of these initiatives came from an education perspective, but many others were potentially applicable from the fields of psychology, health and social care.

A comprehensive review of assessment tools was undertaken to examine learning to date, and to draw on any lessons gained. The main findings are summarised in this section, under the following broad headings:

i. Educational Measurement Tools

ii. Health and Social Care Tools

iii. Professional and Personal Development Tools

i. Educational measurement tools

As Section 3.a. demonstrates, there was a considerable amount of material which dealt with the broad issue of measuring softer skills. Assessment tools identified from the literature trawl in the education sector numbered over 60. Additionally there are an uncountable number of offers of skills, ability and aptitude tests available on the Internet.

Initially brief descriptions of available tools were considered in order to identify those that are geared to the employability skills set out above. Following this we eliminated those tools that were specifically targeted towards particular groups e.g. dyslexics, special educational needs.

Further reductions were made to the search by eliminating the following:

- Programmes that were a curriculum guide for the teaching of soft skills. These tools are designed to take the participant through a number of areas of study. The completion of the programme is the indication of success.

- Tools that cannot offer a measure of distance travelled. We were able to identify a number of assessments designed for one off application, which would give an appraisal of where a trainee is now. These would not suffice for measuring ‘distance travelled’, however, for which we needed an assessment, which is capable of repetition, and illustrating changes achieved.

- Frameworks which set out very broad areas of interest without specifying an assessment method.

- Aptitude / ability tests targeted at careers counselling. They are designed for one-off application and do not seek to measure skills or progress. Many set out to give a description of innate abilities.

- Tests that are too complex in nature. A number of the computer driven assessment tools were pitched at a level suitable for the experienced professional worker, not suitable for our primary target audience.
• Some of the commercially available tests which are costly and did not give sufficient information to justify the expenditure required to examine them.

Having eliminated the above, a few possible examples of assessment tools for employability remained. These were considered in greater detail and a brief resume of each follows.

**Alternative Educational Qualifications**

In recent years a number of alternative educational qualifications have emerged. An example of one of these is the ASDAN Award, which offers curriculum and assessment criteria for each of the 5 QCA ‘Key Skills’: Application of number; Communication; Information technology; Problem solving; Working with others.

These set an alternative curriculum to that found in mainstream formal examinations such as GCSEs. They have been devised to offer an alternative to those people for whom the written examination does not present a possible option. Several of the awarding bodies can also offer accreditation to programmes and courses devised by training and educational organisations.

Within this landscape a significant amount of testing of soft outcomes is already underway. Learners demonstrate their competencies by completing particular tasks and record their work. Some of the areas of learning and skill development set out in the curricula offer help in developing measures of soft skills.

However, it was not possible to adapt these to use as an assessment tool because:

• They are too detailed;

• They already form some of the “hard” outcomes that programmes are reporting;

• They are not measuring attitudinal changes such as self esteem;

• We were looking for a tool that would measure distance travelled for all clients, and particularly those with multiple barriers who may be a long way from attaining employment or a qualification. In such instances, progress would only be measurable against success within the accredited programme;

• They do not provide a baseline assessment from which to measure progress.

**Self-esteem Measures**

Low self esteem and lack of confidence are recognised to be a significant factors in contributing to lack of success in education, training and employment. They emerge as key components in the list of soft skills. Developing such skills is particularly important when working with disadvantaged groups.

There is a long history of attempting to measure self esteem. The area of psychological health provided us with the greatest number of academic studies throughout the research. However, on examination most of them are lengthy and complex psychological diagnostic tests which did not relate to our employability criteria.
Out of all of these tests, one tool did provide some interesting parallels and ideas for what we were trying to achieve. This was Rosenberg’s Self-esteem Scale (Society and the Adolescent Self-Image, Morris Rosenberg 1965 Princeton University Press). The Rosenberg self esteem measure is widely used in social science research and consists of 10 statements which are scaled by the respondent from strongly agree to strongly disagree on a four point scale. The questions include:

- I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.
- I feel that I have a number of good qualities
- I am able to do things as well as most other people.
- I feel I do not have much to be proud of.

Though it was useful in the development of our questionnaire to examine these examples, self esteem and confidence is only one of the identified soft skills for employability and there was a need to develop a more comprehensive approach.

**Tyneside Careers**

Considerable work has been undertaken by Tyneside Careers and Tyneside Connexions around measuring progress in the acquisition of softer skills. Having interviewed them and examined their work in some detail, it was apparent that none of their approaches offered our project a precise workable model, but their experience is interesting and assisted us in our further development. Three assessment tools have been developed with the assistance of Tyneside careers but all are now shelved with the arrival of the Connexions APIR.

**Stop Look and Achieve (The 'Stop, Look and Achieve Induction Pack' – Tyneside Careers)**

This tool was developed for use with young people who have a lot of barriers to learning. It is accredited by the Tyneside Open College Network. It includes teaching materials for individual and group work. It is a resource for those working with young people with assessment through the accreditation process. It has the same disadvantages as the other alternative educational qualifications mentioned above and is additionally targeted specifically at young people. It does, however, cover a number of those soft skill areas that this project considered important to employability:

- Teamwork
- Communication Skills
- Problem Solving
- Social Skills
- Target Setting

**Progress Map (http://www.progressmap.com)**

The progress map was commissioned through New Start in Tyneside. It is a database accessed from a web site. Each person has a password and can access their part of the database. It is a colourful and unusual self-assessment programme developed for young people with integrated planning and curriculum. Each stage of the map looks at issues that the young person may need to address. It is possible to measure distance travelled as the young person works their way through the map. Access to the tool is purchased. This is again more a programme of learning and in a style that would not be suitable for use with older learners.
Distance to the Labour Market (DLM)

Of the three tools developed in Tyneside the Distance to the Labour Market project seemed to most nearly match our criteria. DLM was devised as a framework to support individuals to develop self and career management skills enabling them to move into learning or employment. The concept and framework were developed by the University of Ijselland in Holland in conjunction with two independent consultancy firms. Tyneside Training and Enterprise Council and Tyneside Careers have adapted the concept to meet their requirements.

The target is for young people ‘to function successfully’ in a job or education programme, for a period of six months. The tool (which has both diagnostic and planning uses) uses 23 stages to outline a process of becoming ‘0’ (zero) distance to the labour market (that is, employed or in training successfully for 6 plus months) and includes a curriculum which the individual needs to follow. Figures were collected over a period of time to measure progress of young people through the identified stages.

The stages were:

- Stages 1-5   Profiling and Query (about benchmarking and setting objectives)
- Stages 6-10   Indication and Planning (developing appropriate support, planning actions)
- Stages 11-22  Realisation (delivering the support and activities)
- Stage 23     Functioning successfully in a job or educational programme

These are management stages and no guidance is given in the report as to how the assessment should be done. Such process-driven approaches are useful as a management tool within organisations and can give indications of progress being made. However, many of the stages are not about the client making progress or any intervention being offered and the main “changes” would be contained within stages 11 to 22.

The report does not give any indication as to the issues to be addressed as, in common with many other process tools, it is assumed that practitioners share a common understanding of the skills being addressed. Overall, it was felt that this tool did not meet our criteria for implementing a successful assessment of employability.

The Quality of Life Profile, Quality of Life Research Unit

Research was commissioned from Peter Kent at the University of Toronto by a group of voluntary organisations working with young people in inner city projects with the objective:

“to identify a tool that could measure objectively and credibly, the soft outcomes that are valid measures of the progress young people are making towards the quantifiable outcomes the organisation has agreed with the young person”

The brief for their researchers was:

“To search for an existing instrument or devise a new instrument that is objective, reliable and includes generic measure of progress being made by young people towards quantifiable outcomes. The instrument should be robust yet sufficiently sensitive to capture relatively small changes. The soft outcomes measured should, if possible, be of intrinsic value to individual young people.”

Reinforcing our own experience, the researchers found no suitable ‘off the peg’ tool. This was for a variety of reasons:
• Other tools were too specific, and dealt with too narrow a field (such as employability!)
• Other tools were measures of soft skills such as interpersonal skills
• Other tools were too costly, particularly the commercially available psychometric instruments.

They decided instead to modify an existing tool – the Quality of Life Profile developed by the University of Toronto. This tool aims to give an assessment of “social health” or quality of life, on the basis that where quality of life issues are improved then the ability to achieve those hard outcomes, including success in education, training and employment, are also improved.

The research and development phase of the QOL project has given valuable insight as a parallel to that required by this project. However, the end product envisioned was diametrically opposed to our own objectives and use of this scale was therefore not considered further.

The Rickter Scale

This is one of the few commercially available tools for which it is possible to find good information. It has been used by Connexions partnerships and is specifically geared towards practitioners in the social sector rather than professional careers advisers. A fairly recent article (‘The Rickter Scale: Measuring movement in clients’, Careers Guidance Today, March/April 2000) noted:

“Let us be quite clear, the Rickter Scale is essentially a colourful plastic board. It is no more and no less – a tool, a device, an assemblage of sliders in a framework of scales that read from 0 to 10.”

The board is an innovative device but one which ultimately can be usurped by the computer and the more subtle and exciting graphics offered by this.

The overlays are a series of ten questions that tackle key issues. We looked at the overlays for Preparation for Work and Aspiration/Motivation. The preparation for work deals with attitudes to work rather than the skills required for employability, for example:

• How ready for work do you feel?
• How important to you is having a job?
• How skilled do you feel you are to an employer?

This approach undoubtedly has its merits but it did not meet our objective as a measurement of soft skills for employment. It could be possible to design additional overlays but it was felt that the disadvantage of committing to a commercial package and its costs made this undesirable.

Connexions Framework for Assessment, Planning, Implementation and Review (APIR)

A detailed discussion of the APIR framework is found at Section 3.a. It is intended as a working resource for Personal Advisors, used to identify and overcome barriers to learning and progression. The central part is the profile consisting of 18 factors – based on an assessment of these a “web” of competencies is generated. Although this provided us with
important ideas, and is an important aspect in the overall landscape of assessment this was not suitable for our purposes in view of the issues already considered.

ii. Health and Social Care measurement tools

The plethora of tools available to assess various aspects of health and social care reflects, in part, the wide variety of issues which they are seeking to capture.

There are a number of different reasons why ‘health’ is assessed for an individual. Some of these are diagnostic, some about providing baseline information for individual care packages, some about providing baseline information for national health initiatives.

An attempt has been made to categorise the various different types of health assessment tools on the market. Seven potential categories, or types of tool, have been identified. It is noted that some measurement tools may not neatly fit into one or other category, however. As with educational settings, health assessment tools are largely devised and developed in response to a specific need. With changing needs, tools get adapted.

Broad definitions of types of assessment tools for health

Disease-specific
This is where instruments have been developed to measure the patient’s perception of a disease (or problem). An example of this is the Asthma Quality of Life Questionnaire.

Site or region-specific
This is where health programmes are developed that assess health problems in a specific part of the body. The Oxford Hip Score is a 12 item questionnaire designed to be completed by patients having total hip replacement surgery. Items are summed to produce a single score of level of difficulties arising from the diseased hip.

Dimension-specific
This is where the instrument is to measure one particular aspect of health status, most commonly those measuring psychological well-being. The Beck Depression Inventory is one such example, used to assess depression in the physically ill.

Generic
These tools are designed to measure very broad aspects of health across several dimensions, generally most appropriate for measuring health trends in populations. The SF-36 instrument is one such, scoring people in eight dimensions and then summarising these to produce a health profile.

Individualised
These are instruments which allow respondents to select the content of items and/or select their importance. The Patient Generated Index does this by asking respondents to select their own five most important areas affected by a problem, and then give points to areas where they would most value an improvement (thus, indirectly, it gives at least a conscious measure of motivation).

Summary items
These ask respondents to summarise diverse aspects of their health status using a single item or small number of items. The General Household Survey for England and Wales does this, asking respondents to assess their current health compared with a specific point in the past, but in very broad terms and is therefore a ‘trend’ tool.
Utility measures
These incorporate preferences or values attached to individual health states and express health states as a single index. The EuroQuol EQ-5D contains five items relating to mobility, self-care, main activity, pain/discomfort and anxiety/depression – it then relates these to the economic and social benefits of the country.

Specific Assessment Tools

53 different ‘assessment tools’ are listed in the links page of the National Centre for Health Outcomes Development. A random sample was taken from them, as follows. This demonstrates the enormous divergence of both type and use of tools within the health fields.

Body Image Assessments: BIQLI (Body Image Quality of Life Inventory)
This claims to have developed a 7 point response format of the effects of body image on 19 ‘life domains’. This was only available commercially, so the tool was not viewed, but would seem to fit into that category of health assessment tools designed to give an individual a snapshot of current physical or psychological health. As with other assessment tools found, the commercial availability of this tool suggests that it is driven, at least in part, by a link with an existing commercial interest – in this case beauty or health products.

Canadian Community Health Survey
This health survey (well over a 100 pages) is about establishing baseline data. It has ‘specialist’ sections on a number of health areas. The ones on ‘general health’ and ‘self esteem’ are basic. Participants are invited to assess themselves from ‘Strongly Agree’ to ‘Strongly Disagree’.

Geriatric Depression Scale
This scale was developed as a basic screening measure for depression in older adults. It has been developed by Brink and Yesavage at Stanford University in the US.

EuroQol
This organisation has established an assessment measure called EQ-5D which is a ‘standardised non disease specific instrument for describing and valuing health-related quality of life’. The tool developed is one of broad public health policy applicability rather than individual assessment.

MOS Measures of Quality of Life.
This is produced by Rand, a private health care company in the States. There are numerous different surveys listed, including ‘Patient Satisfaction Questionnaire’, ‘Sleep Scale Survey’ and ‘Visual Function Questionnaire’. These surveys are aimed at establishing baseline data. For example, the survey entitled ‘Health Related Quality of Life Measures from HIV Cost and Services Utilisation Survey’ includes multi-item measures of physical functioning, role functioning, pain etc as well as emotional well being. As such it, and other surveys listed, provide a snapshot of where an individual is at rather than a tool which can provide an assessment of distance travelled.

As can be seen from the above, the range of health assessment tools on offer is enormous and encompasses a wide variety of functions. In the main, however, such tools are developed in order to establish a baseline position, and little was found of relevance in charting ‘distance travelled’ in health care terms.

The commercial influences on developing health assessment tools were also notable, with hundreds of different health, risk and esteem assessment evidence from a trawl of the
internet. For the few which are viewable (most require some form of payment) the aim of these was to establish the need for one or other kind of product or course of action.

In reality, quality is a key way into thinking about health assessment measures. The development of ‘health assessment frameworks’ by, for example, the Department of Health has been in the main driven by a desire to achieve a standard quality of care across services. In other words, the assessment process is firstly designed to enable access to appropriate services, and secondly to ensure that there is a framework for delivery which a service is expected to adhere to.

**Time application in health assessment**

One research paper did direct us towards the use of a time diary as a form of assessing health over a longer period of time. This focuses on the premise that the way you use your time, and one’s overall health, can only be assessed by an ongoing assessment rather than by taking a snapshot at any given time. This was interesting for two reasons: firstly, it was the only overt reference to this found in hundreds of websites, and secondly it would seem to have relevance for the assessment of a person’s softer skills, where evidence should be based on an ongoing, rather than a momentary, analysis.

**Effective Interventions Guide**

This guide provided an overview of assessment tools used in Scotland. Of particular interest were the scales used in assessing drug use and dependency. There are a number of these, which again are about establishing a baseline, but the three of particular interest were the Maudsley Addiction Profile, The Christo Inventory for substance misuse services (CISS) and the Rickter Scale, described above. Given the specificity of the subject matter, none of these scales provided useful content for a softer skills assessment tool, though the format of the scales (particularly Rickter) was interesting, as was the fact that they were applied to assess a comparatively ‘grey’ area of health i.e. addiction and psychological attitudes.

**Rathus Assertiveness Schedule**

This is a 30 item assertiveness scale developed by Rathus in 1973. Individuals are asked to rank 30 statements from –3 (least like me) to +3 (most like me). All the statements concern typical reactions and behaviours in situations requiring assertiveness. Half the statements reflect an assertive behaviour or response, half an unassertive behaviour or response. Completing the scale thus provides a ‘score’ between –90 and +90.

Two interesting points emerged for the development of our tool. The first general point was that we found this scale in use in the ‘softer’ areas of health research, specifically around sexual assertiveness in relation to HIV. As such this (and the Rickter Scale, as mentioned above) were the only scales assessing behaviour and attitudes which we felt to be applicable to the development of our work.

The other, and perhaps obvious, point is that the Rathus model is adaptable for a variety of circumstances. Changing the statements will provide an assessment of a different ‘type’ of assertiveness which is relevant for a variety of contexts.

**iii. Professional and Personal Development Tools**

In addition to education and health and social care, there is a significant industry which encompasses occupational testing.
There are numerous commercial offers of testing and (potential) employee assessment. The industry encompasses a variety of tests that may be used to assess the character, strengths and weaknesses of a candidate for employment. Such testing reached the zenith of fashionability amongst employers in the 1980s and 1990s and these tests became a standard part of employee selection process collectively known as psychometric tests. As a counterbalance there has also grown a parallel market in the offer of guidance to those taking tests and to those using the tests in the fields of career guidance and development.

We looked at some of the information available to determine if there were lessons to be learnt from this field. Two types of tests were considered:

**Aptitude tests**

These assess abilities particularly reasoning, numeracy and literacy, and are scored against a norm.

**Personality tests**

These tests focus on a variety of personality aspects, such as:

- Relating to others
- Work style
- Ability to deal with emotions
- Motivation and outlook
- Ability to handle stressful situations

Tests are usually presented as a statement to which you are asked to respond by:

- Yes/ No/Don’t Know;
- Scale 1 to 5 agree strongly through to disagree strongly;
- Ranking several statements in order or choosing the most appropriate.

Many of these tests are available online, on payment of a fee. It is possible to find a few which are available free usually as a hook to further services, for example a full personal report. In this sense they paralleled our findings on many of the health assessments available via the internet.

One of the most well known tools in this field is the Myers Briggs test, which identifies 16 different personality types.

Significantly, in our search of the commercial web-sites which offer to assess candidates on behalf of employers, the following list of job competencies was found:

- Self-management;
- General communication;
- Problem solving;
- Working with people;
- Personal approach to work;
- Work standards.

That these mirrored those skills that we had identified as measures of employability confirms that employers are interested in these skills and the means of assessing them. This confirms findings from, for example, the careers web-sites which list such skills as vital, and offer
pointers to potential candidates as to how to develop them. As also noted earlier, such skills are considered valuable even where a high level of formal qualification is required.

The methodology to be used in the pilot assessment tool drew lessons from this type of testing. However, these tests and tools are not appropriate to the client profile that we had determined as:

- These are 'tests' in the truest sense of the word and facilitation is not considered appropriate;
- They are geared to self motivated people (or candidates who have no choice if they want a job) and are often conducted remotely;
- They are targeted at professional workers looking at the best ways to develop their careers;
- They are not designed to measure progress and in many instances the personality tests suggest that they are testing characteristics that are not amenable to change;
- They can be costly.

**Summary of key points emerging from a review of existing tools**

- There has been a considerable amount of work done in the field of assessment of young people, while there appears to be a dearth of material concerning assessment of adult learners
- There is a vast array tools which are called ‘assessment’ in the health and social care fields, but which are primarily concerned with the establishment of service need and/or the monitoring of service efficiency and quality.
- Where there are useful tools in the health fields, these overlap with tools in the education field and are around the assessment of attitudes and behaviours, in particular the Rickter Scale
- There are a number of general assessment tools, which examine progression from adolescence to adulthood but none could be found and examined that specifically focussed on skills for employment
- There is a wealth of information available, most of which does not meet our criteria. A small number of projects have trodden the same path but with different ends in mind. No ‘off the shelf’ tool was identified from our research
- None of the examined assessment tools have looked specifically at the skills required for successful employment, rather looking at a much larger range of issues and implying that success in employment and education is more likely to follow if other life skills are in place
- While it is not possible to say with complete conviction that there is not a developed assessment tool, which can measure employability skills, we are confident that if such a tool were available and used with any frequency then evidence of its use would have emerged in our research.
3.c. Accreditation

The work undertaken by this project identified key skills that are considered important to employers. In the development of the assessment tool we specifically dealt with:

- Attendance, punctuality and time management
- Teamwork, communication, self-esteem and confidence
- Motivation, relationships, and how you look and behave

The challenge for the project was to design a tool that would have widespread application. Even within the group of organisations which piloted the tool, there was a wide range of activities being offered to participants of different ages, abilities, interests and employment backgrounds. It also became apparent that although the skills do remain constant for all types of employment, the route to acquiring them will be different and will relate to the particular needs of the individual or group.

Training organisations which are running courses will be working with a developed curriculum and where it is appropriate an accreditation route. Some of the alternative education qualifications have been mentioned above. The route chosen will depend on the existing focus of the training. This may include:

- Basic skills
- Training for a specific industry e.g. media, fashion, IT etc.
- English as a Second Language
- Life skills

Given that training providers are likely to be delivering developed curricula (for which they have secured funding), we concluded that, at this stage of development, the addition of a further accredited qualification with its attendant curriculum would not be helpful or, in many cases, relevant. In addition, and as outlined in section 2.b., it is unlikely that such accreditation would carry weight with employers at this stage.

In the short term, therefore, the assessment tool would offer organisations an evidence based assessment as to whether their courses of study are contributing to the acquisition of softer skills. It will also enable such agencies to assess particular areas which need to be addressed for individual students and groups, and to adapt their courses and discussion to accommodate these.

Accreditation of these areas of learning may be an issue that it would be fruitful to return to once assessment has been established in the practice of organisations.

3.d. Softer Skills Measurement Tools under development

As set out in section 3.a, the growth in the work on assessment and measuring soft skills has been marked. Support by funding and statutory agencies for greater awareness of good practice in the field of measuring soft outcomes has added to this significant, if uncoordinated activity.

In educational and other fields, tools are constantly being devised to assess a variety of factors relating to an individual’s lifeskills, health and well-being, some geared to employability and some not. Our review of assessment tools shows that many of these home-grown systems will remain within the organisations concerned, some will become commercially available, many will be used for a while and then disappear. None were found
to have direct applicability to the development of an assessment tool for Unqualified Success.

Only a few initiatives seem to verge on or slightly overlap the area of research undertaken. These initiatives are, however, important and need to be kept in mind and worked with if we are to ensure that the work undertaken through our research and assessment development does not duplicate or re-invent effort.

1. The Community Development Foundation, through their administration of the Neighbourhood Support Fund, have taken up the challenge to design an assessment tool that can fit for their considerable range of projects dealing with young people. This project is ongoing having passed through the development phase and is currently being piloted. Key to this project is the notion of distance travelled in gaining soft skills. However, those skills will be wide and not those solely associated with employability.

2. The DfES, the Learning and Skills Council, OFSTED and the Adult Learning Inspectorate jointly commissioned a report to examine the possibility of establishing a value added measure for 16-18 year olds and adult learners. David Mason Consultancy were engaged to produce the report with a release date of December 2003. An article in the press has indicated that the report will make proposals for 16 to 19 year olds, but goes on to report that the development of a similar measure for adults is difficult.

3. Workforce, a large Hackney based training provider, has been developing and testing a distance travelled tool, MARIA, since autumn 2003. The tool has been tested on their younger clients (16-24 year olds) in the main. They have found positive uses for the tool for assessment and ongoing work with clients through their learning mentors. At this stage the tool is found to be time-consuming as it requires trainers to manually complete details of client performance throughout a training session and this has been difficult to manage with larger classes. The tool is being reviewed and a second stage of development may take place after that review.

From these reports, it seems that the research will call for an expanded value added measure for 16-18 year olds taking graded level qualifications and a new measure for distance travelled for young people studying non-graded qualifications or modern apprenticeships. However, and again from press reports, there seems to be nothing planned for those over 18 years of age.

This research, and the issues it may throw up around measuring softer skills, may be of significant interest to this area of research. We would note that value added is not the same as distance travelled, however. Value added depends upon a degree of predictability, whilst distance travelled is not age specific and is not about average abilities for an age group. Unfortunately the Mason report did not emerge in time to include its findings in this report.
SECTION 4: LESSONS GAINED FROM ANALYSING EXISTING ACTIVITY

4.a. Types and Formats of tools

The analysis of the existing work in the field of skills assessment, though not providing the project with an “off the shelf” tool to use or adapt, did provide lessons from which the project could draw, on aspects of assessment development, design and delivery. These are summarised below.

Types of Assessment Tools

The media used in assessment tools are:

- Paper based written questionnaires
- Software driven questionnaires
- Web based assessments
- Games
- 3-D Media

Each type of assessment tool was examined to establish their usefulness for the task demanded. The table below shows the various formats that were looked at as part of the analysis of existing tools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paper based written questionnaires</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Client completes a written questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considerations:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Requires a reasonable level of literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can be intimidating to complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• It is too much like a conventional exam or test and may raise issues of fear of failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Requires substantial staff time to score and moderate and then aggregate data across the group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Computer Software Questionnaires</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Client completes a questionnaire on a computer. The software can score and aggregate data and produce a profile or report on the individual and group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considerations:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reasonable literacy levels required but these can be assisted with addition of an audio feature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Client may need to gain some IT skills, but this might be part of the training or learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can reduce administration costs when compared to a paper only tool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The use of the computer can distract from the consideration of the questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The client feels more in control of the process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Games

Clients engage in a game which involves the sorting of cards.

Considerations
- Less intimidating and less like a test than other formats
- Usually sourced from a specialist provider
- May require additional confidence from the staff delivering the assessment

Web-based assessment

Client completes an assessment online. A report or profile can be generated.

Considerations
- Assessment is at arms length from the place of learning
- Reasonable literacy levels required
- Client may need to gain some IT skills, but this might be part of the training or learning
- Can reduce administration costs when compared to a paper only tool
- The use of the computer can distract from the consideration of the questions.
- Web based packages can be visually very attractive
- There will be ongoing costs associated with the use of the tool

It was felt that the flexibility offered by a tool that could be administered as a computer software assessment or on paper would be the most effective for the range of settings and client groups that will be involved.

Self Assessment v Facilitated Assessment

The project team examined the pros and cons of a self-administered assessment tool versus one which needed to be facilitated by a tutor. A brief summary of the issues raised is outlined in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self Assessed</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower costs</td>
<td>Requires high levels of motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can be less time consuming</td>
<td>Harder to check validity – Client may try to pick answers to obtain a better score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Client feels in control</td>
<td>Requires reasonable basic skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can offer the possibility of asking a larger range of questions to check validity</td>
<td>To improve validity, usually a higher number of questions are required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No ability to check client understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cannot ensure consistency across programmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Can be intimidating</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Self-assessment is a skill in itself, requiring self awareness.
Facilitated Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Well trained assessors can provide consistency allowing comparisons to</td>
<td>• Cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be made</td>
<td>• Staff time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Allows for moderation</td>
<td>• There will be ongoing staff training requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Client groups with a range of skills can be assessed in a consistent</td>
<td>• Vulnerable to changes in staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>way</td>
<td>• Fewer questions are possible in a time frame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The assessment can become part of the learning process</td>
<td>• Does not entirely remove the requirement for subjective judgments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Offers greater validity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Offers greater consistency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further consideration was given as to how these various advantages and disadvantages would impact on the target client groups and organisations. The target client groups are set out in some detail in section 2b and include:

- Those who are hard to engage in learning
- Those who have low levels of basic skills including literacy
- Those with poor motivation and self-management
- Those with little experience of constructively using self-criticism
- Those with little experience of success in learning or work.

Given that, for many of these groups, the concept of softer skills will be alien and the process of self-assessment may not be known, it was felt that a facilitated assessment process would have significant advantages. Such a process would involve a tutor or educator who would have good knowledge of the client and who would be able to both challenge and examine evidence to support the assessment. A facilitated process would be able to achieve the following:

- Engage the client in discussion about the softer skills outlined and their importance for employability
- Through this, establish an agenda or curriculum for learning which a self-assessment process would be unlikely to achieve
- Enable the training provider to gain a more in-depth profiling of their client
- Enable more accurate use of the assessment tool, and help avoid inaccurate and non-evidenced assessments
- Provide management information for the training providers to improve and extend their practice

Repetitive scoring to achieve ‘Distance Travelled’

Any questionnaire which aims to measure progress must be able to offer a relative assessment of the level of skill of the respondent. An individual is normally assigned a numerical value on a scale in order to ‘fix’ their relative skill or competence in any particular area at the beginning of such a process. As skills develop the assessment tool would be able to reflect progress through movement along the scale. Normally, the numerical value would move up to indicate positive progress, or down if ground had been lost.

The assessment can therefore be portrayed as a series of numbers (‘scores’) or an overall score. If a software version of a tool is to be developed, there is the possibility of using a
pictorial representation of the scores, much as a ‘cobweb’ of assessment is represented in other assessment tools. This will enable both a graphic and a numerical understanding of progress.

It should be noted that, for a project seeking to measure ‘Distance Traveled’, a scoring ability for the assessment tool is essential. In addition, the assessment must be capable of repetition in order to measure progress made.

**Different types of scales and scoring**

There is a variety of ways in which questions can be posed and scores thus awarded. A brief summary is set out below:

**Likert Scale**

This type of scale presents a number of single statements for which there are a range of responses. Each statement has a scale and the client chooses that which is felt to most nearly reflect their view vis-à-vis the statement given. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The training was useful in my work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The scale could also be a numerical one, for example, ranked in numbers 1 through 5 (ordinal scale). The minimum number of increments for this would be two, and we found evidence that up to seven points are used in such tools.

A numerical value is assigned to each response, resulting in a score for each question and added together an overall score.

**Multiple Option Question**

With this option a question is posed to which there are a range of answers, for example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bus</th>
<th>Train</th>
<th>Walk</th>
<th>Bicycle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do you travel to work?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Single Choice Questions**

Here a question is posed to which the respondent must choose one answer. The answer is chosen from a number of potential answers offered in the questionnaire. A numerical value can be applied to each of the possible answers resulting in a score for each answer, group of answers and overall.

This kind of approach is adopted in, for example, the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule.

**Key lessons from research and type of scale chosen**

After much consideration, it was decided to adopt the following approach based on lessons gathered in the research:

**Format of assessment tool**

As mentioned above, the advantages of having a paper-based and software based programme was clear given the potential target groups of the project. This was considered to
have the widest applicability (it can be used pretty well anywhere) and also the potential for graphic and pictorial representation which could be of great advantage. It also, from our review of other tools, could manage to introduce an element of ‘fun’ into the completion of the assessment tool which was felt to be important.

**Choice of scaling**

It was decided to opt for a single choice question i.e. a series of statements for each element of competency. Clients would opt for one particular statement at the beginning of the process, which would be linked to an (invisible) score. This would provide a baseline starting position, and the process could then be repeated as the training progressed to see if their skills, behaviours or attitudes had altered in the course of the training.

It was felt that this was the most appropriate for several reasons, including:

- It provides a subtle method of distinguishing between different positions which enables the individual to link their response to real-life situations
- If done well it is not obvious which are the ‘good’ or ‘bad’ answers, and if (as decided) the order of statements is jumbled there is no particular clue as to which statements carry which weight. It is therefore more difficult to ‘cheat’
- The statements in themselves provide a means of eliciting discussion with those using the tool. Given that, we realised early on, that any assessment of this nature would have to be interactive and facilitated, and also that it would have a significant contribution to make to a ‘curriculum agenda’.
- It would enable a more detailed analysis of a client’s current responses than that offered by other models, for example multiple choice questions.
- It would enable training providers to plan and create programmes designed around client need
- It would enable repetition, thus providing a measure of ‘Distance Travelled’.

A considerable time was taken in the development phase of the project to ensure that within our agreed assessment model and format the questions asked would reliably offer us a measure of those key employability skills.

The way the questions are framed can influence the outcomes. In arriving at the piloted questionnaire the following issues were important:

**4.b. Best practice**

When researching a variety of assessment tools, we noted several best practice frameworks which set out principles for effective assessment tools. These existed in educational and health settings.

The most relevant of these outlined 8 key principles for an effective assessment tool. These principles provided us with a checklist for developing the tool, as follows:

**Best Practice Principles for Assessment Tools**

**Scope**

We sought to ensure that the questions truly cover the skills for employability, referring to the initial assessment of them.
Validity
We sought to ensure that the questions assessed what we wanted them to. Do the questions elicit information which tests the respondents acquisition of those key employability skills?

Values
We examined the questions to ensure there were no obvious value judgements. It is essential that wherever possible factors in the assessment are verifiable rather than subjective.

Reliability
There was a need to establish that the same results would be achieved by different assessors and in different projects for clients with a similar profile. Issues we addressed were:
- Training of assessors
- Moderation
- Honesty of clients

Practicality
For most organisations the assessment would have to be fitted into an already busy schedule. We looked to ensure that the questionnaire would not be of such length and detail that it could not be undertaken within a reasonable time frame, including initial planning and suitable feedback, without compromising its reliability.

Expertise
While every effort has been made to design a straightforward tool, much of the value will be in how it is used and applied within organisations. Training for staff, in all areas of assessment has been designed and piloted and successful implementation would require ongoing staff training.

Cost
This issue is looked at in more detail below. However, while emphasising that there is a cost to any assessment activity it was the aim to provide a tool that is cost effective.

Fairness
We sought to ensure that the questionnaire is free from value judgment, racial or gender bias.

Non- Threatening format
- Fear of failure or tests
- Do not use negative scores or include a possibility of a nil score
- Quantitative scoring a mixed issue. Makes it something to pass or fail, but it can also be motivating, the higher the score the better you do. Can help demonstrate to the client that progress has been made. Can positively affirm current skills without highlighting unnecessary negative qualities

Clarity of Process
Clients report that they can accept assessments if they can see the point of them

Client Centred Approaches are most beneficial
An assessment which focuses on the individual learner, their skills and the evidence for these, backed up by good feedback and planning for future action will work best with those groups who face multiple barriers to employment. If the client perceives that their interests,
needs and abilities are at the centre of the process they are more likely to fully engage and this will result in a more reliable profile.

The design of the tool

How it looks is important particularly the presentations of the profile or results. Previous experience suggests that careful consideration must be given to the design of the profile if it is to be used across age ranges. Adolescents have been found to respond to a more "entertaining" approach, but care has to be taken that this is not seen as patronising to adults.

Good graphic representation of the personal profile is particularly liked. In one pilot responses on the evaluation overwhelmingly stated that the profiles which listed a series of numbers was “disappointing”. Results of the assessment should be easily accessible and understandable. The use of a voice over for a computer model can assist participants with low levels of literacy. If questions are too repetitive they can be irritating. Use plain English.

Scoring

Must note people who tend to band in the middle of the scoring range (our format guards against this and also eliminates the don’t knows).

Not bureaucratic

Avoid creating an unnecessary amount of paperwork that does not add to the process. Computer models which automatically produce a profile or report can cut down on staff time significantly.

False results

It is advisable to carry out assessment at other times as well as at the beginning and end of programme. This is more responsive to changes and aids reliability.

Introducing the assessment in an organisation

An informal and appropriate setting and atmosphere is conducive to a reliable result.

Link to action planning

The process is only really useful if the result is used to inform services and improves the ability to identify early in a programme potential difficulties.

Commitment to the process by staff

Quality of information is best where relationships are good (FE in Scotland). Assessment is improved by and can improve trust between the student and the member of staff undertaking the assessment. Assessment is ideally a two way process between trainer and client to ensure that judgements are reliable and this can enhance the relationship. Facilitation of assessment can contribute to the learning environment but needs:

- Good training of facilitators
- Full engagement by the facilitators in the delivery and use of the tool is vital for success
- A good understanding of evidence based work by organisations using the tool
- A commitment to the process and to quality control
- The ideal time lapse between testing which will depend on the level of intervention being given and identification of appropriate intervention
4.c. Relationship between curriculum and assessment

It must be emphasised that attempts to assess an individual’s progress in gaining skills for employment will be futile if the activities undertaken with the training groups do not address the barriers to employment that have been identified within the assessment tool. If the training offered does not address these issues in sufficient measure then the tool can do no more than examine at best incidental progress that cannot be attributed to the programme. Of utmost importance then is the curriculum being followed in the various training organisations.

We have established that the training organisations will have obtained funding for a variety of different types of training, but with an underlying objective to increase participant’s employability. At this point in the development of this tool we have not recommended a particular set curriculum but there are a number of both accredited and non-accredited programmes available, which cover, at least in some degree, the skills that we have identified.

The choice of a suitable curriculum and programme will depend on a number of factors including:

- The target age range
- The ability range
- Prior employment experience
- Specific group and individual needs

What effective assessment does offer to the design and application of a curriculum is the possibility of a clear link to the planning for the specific client group. Staff are able to take forward the issues which relate to skill weaknesses which have been identified and ensure that there is a good fit to the programme being offered. The assessment thereby informs directly the curriculum delivery.

The assessment further aids in more effective curriculum delivery in that the individual is made more aware of the disciplines that are required in employment and is better able to gauge their own skill level, due to the process of assessment.

With a more widespread and prolonged use of the assessment tool than has been possible in the pilot period it will be possible to determine with the training organisations whether there is a gap in the available curriculum that needs to be addressed.
SECTION 5: DEVELOPMENT OF SOFT SKILLS MEASUREMENT TOOL

The project team took the assumptions outlined for the research phase, particularly around employment cultural norms and the experience the team have as training providers and employers, to brainstorm what areas the tool would cover. It was always recognised that there would be areas that would be difficult to cover and that the testing and evaluation of the tool would lead to changes.

1. Summary structure of the toolkit

The Life Skills, Work Skills toolkit is designed to assess the extent to which a participant possesses the softer skills required at work. These are generic skills that a range of employers have consistently stated as being needed in the workplace. It should be noted that a participant’s readiness for employment will also depend on the vocational skills they possess for a specific job. The two aspects of vocational skills and soft skills must be taken together. The range of soft skills required are divided into three main sections:

Section 1: How you look

1.1: What you wear
1.2: First impressions
1.3: Non-verbal communication
1.4: Personal hygiene

This set of questions looks at how a participant may appear in the workplace and how far their appearance is appropriate for work. It also includes how a participant may appear to an employer in terms of non-verbal communication and personal hygiene.

Section 2: How you behave

2.1: Attendance
2.2: Being on time – punctuality
2.3: Time management – prioritisation
2.4: Working with others
2.5: Communication

This set of questions looks at some specific measurable and some more subjectively assessed behaviours that a participant may exhibit at work, both on their own and when working with others.

Section 3: How you feel

3.1: Self esteem
3.2: Confidence
3.3: Motivation
3.4: Attitude to authority
This set of questions looks at the underlying feelings or attitudes that may affect certain behaviors at work.

The tool is designed to be used in a holistic way. Although it may be successfully used to highlight specific areas of development for individual participants, individual sections should not be used in isolation from one another.
2. Use of the toolkit

Target group
The tool can be used with a wide range of participants seeking work. Because of the generic nature of the skills and their applicability to a range of work settings the tool has a broad use. The language has been structured to be used with both younger and older people, but the facilitation methodology may change for these groups.

For a participant to use the tool at any point on their own they will need to have some reading skills, probably at around level 1 of the national literacy levels. This is important as there are subtleties within the differences to the multiple choices and participants must be able to clearly understand these differences in order to answer correctly.

It should be noted that participants with ESOL needs may struggle in using the tool, because of the level of language understanding required, particularly in identifying the difference in the multiple choices, which can be quite subtle. Mother tongue facilitation may help this but this has not been tested and, there is a danger that translation may lose the subtlety in each of the choices.

Participants should be able to undertake some analysis of themselves and their behaviour. Participants need not have a very high level of self awareness as the facilitated methodology described below helps to mitigate a lack of self awareness (or honesty!).

When to use the tool

The tool is designed to be used, ideally in a development situation where there is some knowledge of the participant and her/his behaviour. The tool may be used at the very start of a development programme, but it will rely heavily on an accurate self assessment by the participant, with the facilitated element being used to check understanding and to validate answers.

Ideally the tool should be used at the end of an extended induction (probably around week 4 of a programme) to allow the participant time to settle in and gain trust and to allow time for the facilitator to get to know the participant. The tool can then be used at a later stage to check progress and to measure the “distance travelled” for the participant.

Methodology

The tool is designed to be used through a facilitated self assessment methodology. This is because we have limited the number of questions asked in order hold people’s interest. With such a limited range of questions it is not possible to undertake a validation test internally within the tool itself. The tool also requires a reasonable level of language understanding and the facilitation can ensure that clients understand the difference between the multiple choice answers. The reasoning behind this is that the tool is designed around work readiness.

While participants may complete parts of the tool themselves they should always discuss their results with a facilitator. The facilitator should be someone who knows the participant, particularly in terms of how they might react in a work situation. This could be a member of training staff or a learning mentor.

Ideally facilitation should be very active rather than passive. Some of the questions are very personal and the facilitator will need to be able to challenge a participant’s answers if he/she suspects an incorrect or misleading answer may have been given. The facilitator will also need to be able to explain the questions and multiple choice answers, perhaps re-phrasing where necessary. Care should be taken to ensure that the overall meaning is not changed. Facilitators should also provide hard information (e.g. attendance) where this is available.

The tool would be particularly useful if used in a vocationally specific way with a learner. An instance of this would be in the section on personal appearance where the facilitator could ask the participant what type of clothing would be appropriate for their chosen occupation. Another instance would be asking participants during the section on “First impressions” how they would get to know people when starting in a new job. To validate the answers the facilitator could refer back to the participant’s behaviour when beginning the programme.

The tool requires one choice to be made from 5 possible answers to each of the 13 questions. Each answer is then converted to a score. All the answer choices are mixed up in order that picking the first choice does not consistently give a user the lowest score. It should also be noted that the scores are only relative ones; they indicate the level of distance travelled rather than a specific point of development.
On the paper version there is space to record any particular reasons for an answer. This is important as it gives the maximum scope for personalising the tool for individual participants. It can be used to record examples of particular behaviours (positive and negative) and also any areas of unresolved disagreement between the facilitator and the participant. Sources of evidence might include:

- Attendance data
- Diaries
- Portfolios
- Feedback from interviews
- Feedback from placements
- Feedback from tutors
- Peer feedback

3. RESULTS

Although it is possible to give an overall score out of 130, this is to be discouraged. It is important that the score to each question is seen in the context of the participant and his/her stage of development, work ambitions and distance travelled. Therefore, each score should be transposed to a profile sheet with the innermost ring representing a score of 2 and the outermost ring representing a score of 10.

The profile will then show the areas of strength for each participant and the areas to focus on in terms of development activity. An example profile is shown below:

EXAMPLE PROFILE FOR SKILLS FOR SUCCESS AT WORK TOOL

This visual profile enables an overall snapshot to be gained. Points to the centre of the circle require more development than those on the outside. There is an Excel version of the questionnaire that enables the profile to be generated automatically. Alternatively, the profile can be mapped out manually by plotting the points on a blank paper version and joining up
the dots. This in itself may be a useful activity for some participants, particularly in developing literacy, numeracy as a class-based exercise.

Once a profile has been successfully mapped out and agreed with the participant, mutually agreed development actions should take place. Development actions can be planned based on the areas of the profile that are nearer the centre of the circle. It is probably preferable to plan development actions generally around the main areas of the tool, i.e. How you look, How you behave and How you feel. In this way, personal development can take place in a more holistic context rather than focusing on one segment of the tool. It is important that development planning refers to the comments made by the facilitator and the participant.

The tool can then be used again as part of a review process. Individual scores for each question can be compared to judge distance travelled in particular areas, although it may be more useful to compare subtotals for each of the three main areas of the tool. Overall, holistic progress can be measured by comparing the original profile with the new one. Facilitators should take the opportunity to carefully explain the difference in the profiles to participants to ensure that they fully understand the areas where progress has been made.
SECTION 6: EVALUATION

Introduction

Following the work by the research team on existing theory and practice relating to the measurement of soft skills, the measurement tool ‘Skills for Success at Work’ was designed. This was ready to pilot with the participating organisations by the third week of January 2004. Six organisations were paid to test the tool with clients with a clear understanding that the payment covered the requirement to fully participate in the training to deliver the draft tool and co-operation with the evaluation of the tool and the test period. Staff from the organisations attended one of two scheduled training sessions for the six week pilot phase, ending in early March 2004. In this evaluation these organisations are identified by the letters A –F. This evaluation report:

- describes the process by which the tool to measure soft skills for work was piloted and tested
- analyses the results of the pilot
- draws conclusions from these results
- makes recommendations for future work in this area.

Each organisation undertook to identify 10 trainees (1 provider identified 20 trainees) who could do the assessment twice in the six week period assigned to the pilot, once near to the beginning and once as near to the end of the test period as possible. In practice this meant a maximum of five weeks between the two assessments and in some cases it was less.

The assessments were carried out in a variety of ways with varying amounts of facilitation, according to the preferences, style of course delivery and practicalities of the organisations themselves. Across the sample groups, there were individual assessments, group assessments, paper only assessments, Excel only assessments and combinations of all of these. In all, 78 people completed the first assessment and 39 completed both. (See Conclusions, below, for explanations)

Training for the pilot

Representatives from the participating organisations were invited for a one day training course, delivered by the designers of the tool

The aims of the course were to:

- raise awareness about and define ‘soft skills’ and their relevance for employers and employability
- consider the impact of facilitation on the process of measuring soft skills with this tool and what skills are required by facilitators
- provide an opportunity for participants to try out both the paper version and the electronic version of the tool and consider the relative applications of both approaches
- reflect on the application of the tool for the different kinds of client groups represented by the participating organisations
- think about how the tool might be used with clients with special learning or language needs
- plan how to organise the pilot in their own organisations
- explore the potential for action planning as part of the process
Several issues arose from the training day. Some of the organisations, particularly those who provide training for mentally disabled people, already embed and foreground soft skills in the style and content of their training. They bring useful insights and commitment to this research. The field of mental health training has been attempting to find an effective method of measuring soft skills, whether or not it is attached to employability training. Some doubts were expressed about how accessible the tool would be for beginner stage ESOL clients. Some of the providers made the point that clients need to have achieved proficiency with English before entering the job market. They considered therefore that this tool could only be used for learners who already have good language skills.

Table 1: **Summary of the Pilot Context**: This table shows the varied methods of delivery of the tool, the different client groups, training courses and timings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provider</th>
<th>Course/level</th>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>No. of trainees test 1</th>
<th>No. of trainees test 2</th>
<th>Paper/excel version</th>
<th>Individual/group</th>
<th>Time between tests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Dressmaking. Most at NVQ Level 2. Some taster trainees not yet Level 2.</td>
<td>16-23</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Paper version first, then transferred to excel.</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>4 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Adult Literacy and CLAIT for people with mental health problems</td>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Both – some did paper version in literacy class and transferred to excel in IT.</td>
<td>2 Literacy classes as group. IT individually</td>
<td>3 –4 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Employability for NVQ Level 2</td>
<td>16-19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Paper</td>
<td>In class group but individually</td>
<td>No retest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Basic Horticultural Skills Entry Level for people with mental disability</td>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Paper</td>
<td>Individually</td>
<td>No retest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Various courses, IT, ESOL, Levels 1 and 2</td>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Individually</td>
<td>4 – 5 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Range of literacy and IT courses, levels Entry 3 to Level 3 for employees in local council</td>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Paper</td>
<td>In class group but individually</td>
<td>2-3 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>71</strong></td>
<td><strong>39</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Questions to providers

The questions to facilitators and managers were arranged in four “Topic” headings. Each organisation was visited twice and interviews were held with facilitators, managers and clients.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The process</th>
<th>The tool</th>
<th>The measurement</th>
<th>The cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How was the tool introduced to users? (Individually/in groups?)</td>
<td>How appropriate is the reading level of the questions?</td>
<td>What measure of progress does the tool provide?</td>
<td>From your experience of the pilot, what do you think are the financial costs to your organisation of implementing the measuring of soft skills in this way?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How were the sessions conducted? (individually/in groups/within specific training or pastoral sessions)</td>
<td>How satisfactory is the design and layout of the tool?</td>
<td>What effect does Action Planning have on progress?</td>
<td>Would your organisation continue to use the tool, even if there were no requirement to do so?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On average, how long did each session take? Were some sessions significantly longer than others? Why?</td>
<td>Are there specific items or questions that you found particularly useful?</td>
<td>How does the measurement add value to the existing outcomes of your training?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What skills, if any, does a facilitator need?</td>
<td>Are there specific items or questions that you found inappropriate or of little use?</td>
<td>What benefits accrue from the measuring of soft skills for your users and for your organisation?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the idea of measuring soft skills meet the needs and interests of the users?</td>
<td>Are there any significant gaps in the areas covered by the questions?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is the process affected differently by using the electronic or paper version of the tool?</td>
<td>What is the effect of the scoring system? Does it motivate users?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you collected any feedback from your users on their experience of the process?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Key responses from facilitators and managers relating to the four “Topic” headings

The process:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provider</th>
<th>Provider responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>- Best done individually with paper version, and then transferred to electronic version (for fun?)&lt;br&gt;- Facilitator needs to be skilled to get honest response&lt;br&gt;- Good opportunity for trainees and trainers to raise important issues, thus meeting needs of both&lt;br&gt;- Facilitation introduces element of subjectivity which could produce different results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>- Facilitator’s skills similar to teaching i.e. ability to draw out ideas and guide thinking.&lt;br&gt;- This process adds another unwelcome layer of administration and paperwork.&lt;br&gt;- Some need to alleviate anxiety aroused by these questions for clients with mental health issues, so good to do the assessments in a group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>- Introduced to the group of 16 -18 year old trainees on various NVQ level 2 and 3 course as part of their employability training, after session on CVs (where it seemed to fit well)&lt;br&gt;- Trainer new to these trainees and provided light support over answering questions rather than facilitation.&lt;br&gt;- Each trainee took 10 -15 minutes to complete assessment in paper version.&lt;br&gt;- Tool raises important issues this group which have not been made explicit in other contexts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>- Good model to involve clients in assessment of soft skills and good for clients without mental disability.&lt;br&gt;- Most of this organisation’s clients do not have sufficient self awareness to be able to answer the questions with any degree of reliability.&lt;br&gt;- For this client group change is slow and likely to happen over a much longer period than this pilot.&lt;br&gt;- Assessments were conducted individually, and took up to 2 hours to facilitate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**The tool:**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language appropriate for level 2 trainees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questions on time management and attitudes to authority particularly useful in action planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some overlap between elements of questions and difficulty in seeing subtle differences between choices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trainees enjoyed doing it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language is generally fine for this group though some with literacy and ESOL needs benefit from help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appearance of the tool too much like other tests and assessments and would benefit from further design to convey fun element.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal hygiene question particularly sensitive for this group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Issues of confidence and self esteem particularly relevant to this group and lack of them often the key barrier to employment, so more detailed questions on this area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading level appropriate for these trainees, but some found questions difficult to decide upon and gave more than one answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boxes for comment welcomed to fill in detail where trainees were undecided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>D</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questions too complex and with too many choices for this client group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clients found questions on communication and those on how you feel most difficult to answer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questions about motivation are difficult and may do no more than assess the client’s drug regime.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>E</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language levels mostly fine, but differences between questions difficult to distinguish with ESOL trainees, even those with fairly well established language skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>F</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Design and layout of the tool felt to lack appropriate seriousness for the topics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General feeling that these questions had already been considered by clients and were not relevant for people in employment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Values in questions too transparent and not enough room for cultural difference in, for example, questions about attitudes to authority.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The measurement:**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Action planning can bring about change within 4-6 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 assessments over the course of a 6 month training would be beneficial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This kind of assessment adds to the training already undertaken in the organisation and should be integrated into it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time intensive process, amounting to about 1 day per trainee to include 2 assessments, action planning and paperwork.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Important to stress that answers should not be influenced by what other people want to hear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Values are too clear in answers – too obvious what the ‘right’ answers are.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Action planning opportunity welcomed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Period of pilot far too short in itself for any meaningful measurement and more so for this particular group for whom change happens over a long period and is also subject to mood and medication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>These trainees were not retested at this time because the organisation joined the pilot late, but felt to be relevant and possibly productive over the 14 month training period at this organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>D</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Measurement for this group at least a year, as change is slow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Welcome structure of question choices and client involvement, but measurement for this group may need different levels of assessment for different degrees of disability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Important to measure progress as soft skills are central to training and explicitly addressed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>E</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good to attempt to measure these skill in addition to existing qualifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>F</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pilot too short to measure significant change, but interest in the approach to measurability.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The cost:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Cost heavy process but beneficial to trainees as additional training, especially I valued by employers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>No comment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>No comment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Such time-consuming processes have high staff costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Staff costs are high, but a valuable exercise in providing insight into trainees’ experience of the organisation – could be useful for trainers to improve their courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>No comment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary of responses from clients:

Interviews were carried out in every participating organisation. Clients’ comments included the following points:

- The tool had the positive effect of raising awareness about soft skills that some clients, particularly the younger ones, aged 16-18, had not considered before.
- They valued the opportunity to have their achievements in soft skills recognised and to think about how these issues impact on their employability.
- The personal hygiene question attracted a great deal of unease and hostile criticism.
- The question on punctuality and non-verbal communication caused some problems as no one answer seemed to fit the particular behaviour of a number of clients.
- Many clients enjoyed doing the assessments, especially the Excel version.
- Many clients enjoyed the opportunity to get involved in discussions about these aspects of the working environment.
- Some clients enjoyed using the boxes at the bottom of each page to expand on their answers with additional written comments.

Measurements:

Tables 4a and 4b shows a comparison of measurement of “distance travelled” based on the two organisations, A and E, where the total of 19 trainees completed both assessments over 4-5 weeks. These results were selected as they give the most information in terms of:

- Covering the longest period of time available in the pilot
- Having no barriers to retesting in terms of suitability of the trainees

The details of how the tests were conducted are shown in Table 1 and there are some important differences between them that may have affected the different measurements.

Table 5 summarises the score change, or movement for the two organisations represented in Table 4.

Table 6 identifies the specific areas in which change took place.
Table 4a: Comparison of measurement of “distance travelled” over the pilot period – Provider E

Table 4b: Comparison of measurement of “distance travelled” over the pilot period – Provider A

Table 5: Summary of score movement for the two providers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provider</th>
<th>% increased score</th>
<th>% same score or less</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6: Particular areas of improvement in the scores of trainees in organisations A and E

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question number</th>
<th>Number of trainees whose score increased</th>
<th>Number of trainees whose score decreased or stayed the same</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How you look</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How you behave</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How you feel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Commentary on results of Tables 4, 5 and 6:

- More trainees increased their scores than didn’t. The gains in Provider E are slightly higher than those in Provider B. What factors might have affected this difference? There is a different kind of relationship between the facilitators and the trainees in the two organisations. In Provider A, the trainer delivers and conducts most of the training and knows the trainees well. They are a single group all following one NVQ Level 2 course. In Provider E, the facilitator does not teach any of these trainees but sees them on a regular basis in a drop-in open-access learning centre where her role is to provide learning support. The trainees are following a variety of level 1 and level 2 courses in literacy and IT.

- In both organisations assessments were facilitated on an individual basis with assessments taking on average 45 minutes each.

- Some of the Provider E trainees are second language learners for whom the questions needed more guidance and explanation. The Provider A trainees are all native speakers.

- The Provider A trainees are all younger than the adult Provider E group.

- The greatest gains across the two groups were made in:
  - Non-verbal communication
  - Time management
  - Communication
  - Self esteem
  - Confidence
• The least gains across the two groups were made in:
  
  - First impressions
  - What you wear
  - Personal hygiene
  - Attendance

It is not possible to make firm interpretations about the areas where gains were or were not made. However, it may be that there is some therapeutic benefit from raising awareness of these issues which positively affects self-image. Certainly, in the area of non-verbal communication, a number of clients commented that they had not explored this area explicitly before. In becoming suddenly conscious of the effect of body language, they may have modified or begun to modify their behaviour. On the other hand, some of the losses in the areas of confidence and self-esteem were reported to have come about as a result of increased self-consciousness and self-awareness, so that on reflection after the period of 4-5 weeks, a few trainees’ doubts about their self-confidence is reflected in the scoring.

Conclusions

Of the 78 participants who completed the first set of forms, only 39 completed the second. This is due to the following reasons:

• One mental health organisation considered that the tool was not suitable for its client group
• One organisation had considered using beginners in ESOL, but found that the language requirements of the tool were too high. More suitable learners were recruited within the organisation but it was too late for them to complete the second assessment within the time of the pilot.
• In one case this proved to be too onerous a task for the tutor who was employed on an hourly basis.
• As the pilot phase was so short there was no time for clients absent at the second assessment, to be able to complete the task at a later date.

The attempt to measure soft outcomes was welcomed by all the participants in the pilot. These skills are implicitly or explicitly present in all forms of employability training and are recognised as important by training organisations and their clients. This tool has the potential to bring the teaching of soft skills for employability to the foreground in employability training and to enrich the curriculum.

This small scale study indicates that it is possible to obtain a recordable measurement that marks the progress in soft skills outside the national qualifications framework and that this measurement is felt to be of value to these particular clients and to their training providers.

Facilitation is a key aspect of this form of attempting to measure soft skills development. The skills required for facilitation of the tool encourage trainers or other personnel to engage with trainees in ways that enhance their communication skills with this group of the population for whom motivation and confidence need to be built if they are to secure employment.

The tool in its present form worked better with some client groups than others. The experience of the pilot suggests that young trainees benefit particularly well. Some groups, such as people with special learning or language needs, whose employment prospects are limited, need their progress to be measured, but in different ways.
This approach to measurement is time consuming and consequently costly. In the pilot the facilitation required varied from 15 minutes to 2 hours per individual for each assessment. The longer sessions included action planning which was felt to be a vital part of the process.

Recommendations

- A bigger scale study analysing fully the costs and benefits of this approach should be carried out over at least a year, with focus on particular client groups.

- There should be work to develop the tool and explore its possible applications in different training contexts.

- There should be further work on the role of the facilitator in this method of measuring soft skills development, including definition of terms and agreed terminology.

- Employers should be consulted about the value of the terminology and the measurement of soft skills.
SECTION 7: FUNDING ISSUES

Introduction

Any activity will have a cost to the organisation whether indirect, direct or both. It was considered important to examine the economic affects of implementing an assessment programme in a learning environment and the following issues were examined:

The initial start up costs

These are the costs associated with introducing an assessment process including:

- Purchase of resources including hardware, software and printed material
- Training of staff
- Additional staff time to administer, evaluate and to embed in organisation
- Follow up work with trainees and recognition of success

Recurring Costs

These are the ongoing costs of the continued implementation and include:

- Renewing resources for new groups of trainees
- Training newly recruited staff
- Staff time to administer and evaluate results
- Development of the use of assessment in the organisation
- Follow up work with trainees and recognition of success

Using these headings we examined the costs associated with a number of assessment packages drawing information from their promotional material and assuming a training group of 10 participants. Although it is not possible to thoroughly examine those packages that are offered commercially, a broad indication of costs is given. An assumption that these tools could be taken and used “off the shelf” was made. Evidence discussed elsewhere in this report demonstrates that this is unlikely to be the case. There may be further development and adaptation costs of using one of the commercially available tools if it were to be used successfully in the training for employability field.

Broad Findings

- The start up costs do not differ significantly with costs ranging between £3000 to £4000 for a group of 10. There would be economies to be gained for a larger group or a whole organisation.
- The recurring costs differ significantly with costs ranging between £1500 to £2000 for a group of 10.
- The highest recurring costs lie with computer only packages that require an annual site licence.
- Costs are higher where computer hardware is involved, however this is not thought to be a significant inhibitor, as most training settings will have IT fit for this purpose. It does however, underline the desirability of having both a computer and paper driven system.
- Copyright on printed materials is also a factor in increased recurring costs.
- Assessment requires explicit and proper funding in the same way as there are costs of formal accreditation routes.
• The recurrent costs must be taken into consideration in preparing budgets for training programmes.
• Trainers need to be aware of the need to include the costs of assessment in funding applications.
• Funding bodies need to be clear that there is an additional cost to effective assessment of the progress of trainees, if it is to be consistent and reliable.

There may however, be savings and benefits from effective assessment of soft skills in terms of:
• Improved professional development and focus of staff.
• An improved focus on the soft skills required to gain employment and better assessment of success.
• Early refocusing of training that is not providing the required outcomes for the trainees.
• A clearer focus on employability for training schemes whose primary purpose is to increase employment chances.

### Cost Framework of Tools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Unit Cost</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Registration Fee</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Training</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing Costs to attend training 1</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing Costs to attend training 2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training materials (Tutor pack)</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trainee Packs</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance session half day equivalent per trainee</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>312.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderation session - half day</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trainee celebration</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of Trainee packs</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Initial Costs</strong></td>
<td><strong>2322.5</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Net of VAT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recurring Costs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Unit Cost</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Training for new staff</td>
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<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing costs to attend training</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trainee Packs</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replacement Trainer Boards and materials</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance sessions</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderation sessions</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>celebration</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Recurring Costs</strong></td>
<td><strong>1515</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Net of VAT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Skillscheck

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Unit Cost</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Registration Fee (network licence)</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Commercially available computer programme for self-assessment.
Produces personal development plan with job suggestions. Helps user to write a
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Unit Cost</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Registration Fee</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Training</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing Costs to attend training 1</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing Costs to attend training 2</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Costs to attend training day 3 half day</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training materials (Tutor pack)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trainee Packs</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance session half day equivalent per trainee</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderation session - half day</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trainee celebration</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windows based package (incidental hardware costs)</td>
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</table>

**Total Initial Costs** 2980 Net of VAT

<table>
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<tbody>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing Costs to attend training 1day</td>
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**Total Recurring Costs** 1992.5 Net of VAT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Unit Cost</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Training</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing Costs to attend training 1</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing Costs to attend training 2</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Costs to attend training day 3 half day</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training materials (Tutor pack)</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trainee Packs</td>
<td>250</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guidance session half day equivalent per trainee</td>
<td>62.5</td>
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<td>625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderation session - half day</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>250</td>
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<tr>
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**Total Initial Costs** 4795 Net of VAT

<table>
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<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Training</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing Costs to attend training 1day</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recurring Costs**

Commercially available tool covering ability, attitude and personal style. Interactive "fun" assessment exercises completed by client with support. Manual and computerised options. Developed to reduce drop out rate in modern apprenticeships. Looks similar in its description to the Unqualified Success tool. Revolves around 2.5 days training for each member of staff. All materials are provided and copyright lifted. We have assumed that trainee materials will have to be photocopied. No mention of license fee for computerised version.

**Total Recurring Costs** 1992.5 Net of VAT

MAPS Indicator John Cooper Associates
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Unit Cost</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Registration Fee</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Training</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing Costs to attend training 2</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance session half day equivalent per trainee</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderation session - half day</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>Trainee celebration</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Recurring Costs</strong></td>
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<td><strong>2095</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Net of VAT</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Unqualified Success                            |           |        |         |
| Item                                           | Unit Cost | Number | Amount  |
| Registration Fee                               | 0         |        | 0       |
| Professional Training                          | 525       | 2      | 1050    |
| Staffing Costs to attend training 1            | 125       | 4      | 500     |
| Staffing Costs to attend training 2            | 125       | 4      | 500     |
| Guidance session half day equivalent per trainee| 62.5      | 10     | 625     |
| Moderation session - half day                  | 62.5      | 4      | 250     |
| Trainee booklet                                | 5         | 10     | 50      |
| **Total Initial Costs**                        |           |        | **3280**|
| **Net of VAT**                                 |           |        |         |

| Recurring Costs                                |           |        |         |
| Professional Training for new staff            | 525       | 1      | 525     |
| Staffing costs to attend training day1         | 125       | 1      | 125     |
| Staffing costs to attend training day2         | 125       | 1      | 125     |
| Guidance sessions                              | 62.5      | 10     | 625     |
| Moderation sessions                            | 62.5      | 4      | 250     |
| Celebration                                    | 300       | 1      | 300     |
| **Total**                                      |           |        | **1950**|
| **Net of VAT**                                 |           |        |         |
SECTION 8: RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a need for an assessment tool which helps to profile the softer skills of clients and act as a framework to help discuss and explore these. The benefits of this are outlined in the course of this report. It would clearly meet a gap in current training provision and client assessment.

The project team are not able to recommend any one of the currently available tools for use in Hackney without investment in refining these to meet the requirements identified in the original tender documentation.

The assessment tool produced in the course of the Unqualified Success project, Life Skills Work Skills, which draws on elements of good practice from a variety of fields, has received initial piloting. In order for this tool to be further developed and introduced in a way to achieve maximum impact, the following is recommended:

1. Further work is undertaken to accurately cost the use of the assessment tool. It is noted that such a tool cannot be effective without ongoing investment, and will potentially prove counterproductive if the costs of its introduction, maintenance and evaluation are not met.

2. The public investment of funds in the development of this tool requires the funders, at least, to ensure that the tool is used as part of the contracting arrangements for funded employability skills training, once the tool is fully developed.

3. Staff training needs to be incorporated and funded as part of introducing the tool into any training provider. The success of the tool will be intrinsically linked to staff understanding its purpose, use and application.

4. The tool needs to be accompanied by guidance on its use. This should include the need for facilitation, the need for repeated application, and also a guide to which groups it is most likely to benefit. It is unlikely to be appropriate, for example, with those who are only recently unemployed, nor is it usable with groups which do not have sufficient use of English to understand nuances of the statements key to the assessment process.

5. The tool should be further piloted, and versions produced for sub-sections of its overall target audience. For example, there can be a version for young people, which will differ in style and presentation from others. A second phase of the project should identify particular target groups, and the level to which the tool can and should be customised for these.

6. Further work on how to identify softer skills progress with those with severe barriers to learning needs to happen, particularly in relation to those with ESOL needs and Learning Difficulties. This tool can provide a starting point for discussion, but needs development and further work.

7. An information and lobbying strategy is devised to ensure that funding bodies both know about and recognise the merits of softer skills assessment. The aim of such information would be to ensure that, ultimately, the achievement of progress in softer skills is one way of demonstrating outcomes for funded training providers.
8. The need for an accredited curriculum around softer skills, though currently found not to be necessary, needs to be monitored. Given the rapid evolution of qualifications in this area, and the increasing awareness of softer skills by employers and other stakeholders, a review of this area should be planned for the future.

9. There is a need to agree standard terms across this area of work. This should begin locally, if only to ensure colleagues are clear about what is being discussed.
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Appendix 1: Unqualified Success Project Team

The Unqualified Success project team was brought together for their range of skills, knowledge and practical experience of delivering research, product development and projects working with people with low skills, the unemployed, employers and funders.

**Elizabeth Balgobin** led the project team and managed the recruitment of organisations to test the tool. She led on all finance and contract issues. She has led 8 similar successful research projects (using external consultants) in the last 3 years. She has over 18 years management experience, the last six running a Hackney based umbrella organisation for voluntary sector learning providers. She has developed specialist knowledge on basic skills, ESOL and employment issues through her current work. She is also a local council member of the Learning and Skills Council London East.

**Ceri Hutton** was part of the research team, specialising in soft skills measurement in related sectors (health, social care and housing). Ceri has extensive experience of monitoring and assessing the softer ‘health’ outcomes of services such as Housing Support and Legal Advice, most latterly in her role as Director of Immunity Legal Centre. She has conducted numerous reviews on training and support provision, often working with a team from HTEN. She has undertaken work for the DfES, the Renewal Partnership and Connexions.

**Geraldine Rees** was part of the research team, specialising in education, young people and adult learning. She has 15 years experience of public sector service delivery in a number of fields including housing, social services and, more recently, the statutory education sector. She holds and M Phil degree with distinction and has conducted published research on property issues and additionally has undertaken research into school management and adult education provision. Geraldine has wide experience of project development, management and evaluation particularly in the fields of education and regeneration.

**Tank** developed the measurement tool for piloting with organisations. Both Directors at Tank (Graham Finegold and Katharine Moy) have had extensive experience of a range of assessment and measurement methodologies of soft skills including the development of a best practice guide on holistic assessment and a large research project working across the DfES, Home Office, DoH and DWP, which looked at relativities of measurement tools in a range of settings. Both Directors are qualified by the British Psychological Society with a Certificate of Competence in Occupational Testing (Level A).

**Wendy Weinstock** carried out the independent internal evaluation of the project and the measurement tool. She has wide experience of advising on the quality of teaching and learning of young people in secondary schools, further education colleges and in the voluntary sector. She has specialist knowledge in ESOL and literacy and language, gained through long experience in teaching and advisory work in the London Boroughs of Hackney, Islington, Southwark, Lambeth and Hammersmith and Fulham. Her work in quality assurance has covered a wide range of community provision in Hackney for The Learning Trust and in Islington for City and Islington College. She has developed and piloted a scheme for measuring soft outcomes in an arts based project for young refugees and asylum seekers in further education.
Appendix 2 – Organisations Testing the Draft Tool

City and Hackney Mind
Community College Hackney, the Workplace Skills Team
House of Antoine
Springboard Hackney Trust
Thrive, St. Mary’s Garden Project
UXL