Selection

Matching learners to opportunities

What?
- find out where potential learners are coming from
- assess suitability
- make sure learners know what to expect.

Why?
Selection follows on naturally from recruitment (see the factsheet entitled ‘Recruitment’). Once potential recruits have been identified, a decision must be made about:
- which individuals to take on as employees
- which is the best learning programme for them.

The purpose of selection is to get people that match the needs of the business. When selecting to a learning programme such as a Modern Apprenticeship (MA), it’s also essential to learn more about the person’s learning goals and their likely support needs. More on this in the factsheet entitled ‘Initial assessment’.

The end point of the selection process is to make a sensible, informed decision about someone’s suitability for a job and their next step in learning.

How?

Find out where potential learners are coming from

Learners who are interested in their chosen area and motivated by it are far more likely to succeed than people with only a lukewarm interest. So it’s essential to find out where potential learners are coming from. What do they really want to do in their working lives?

Answers are needed to questions like these:
- Why is this person interested in this type of work?
- What have they found out about it so far?
- What experience do they have in it?
- What makes them suitable for this kind of work?
- What do they think might be difficult about it?

Some people are well-informed about the area they want to work in. They know what it involves and are realistic about it. Others don’t really know enough to make an informed decision and may have unrealistic ideas about what’s involved. They may need more information about the training programme and what the job entails.

An important purpose of selection is to distinguish between these two categories. The selection process has to give potential learners a chance to show that they understand the area of work they are going into. And it should give those who are less well-informed a chance to find out more and review their choice.
Assess suitability

What makes people suited to a particular job or type of work? The main factors to be investigated as part of the selection process are:

- Ability and aptitude – for example, some occupations require specific qualifications or a level of manual dexterity.
- Aspirations and commitment – if someone starts a learning programme, how likely are they to complete it?
- Knowledge – whether they know enough about what the type of work offered by an employer actually involves.
- Basic skills – how much help they need to develop their literacy, numeracy and language skills to the standard required.

There are various ways of finding out about these things. Tests can provide relatively objective information about ability, knowledge and basic skills. They can also help to assess support needs and identify learners eligible for funding to support their additional learning needs.

If there are specific entry criteria, such as qualifications, they will need to be checked at this stage. And unless the criteria are rigorously enforced, it’s likely that the process may involve other methods as well, such as interviews.

Interviews are a good way of finding out about people’s aspirations and commitment. It’s possible to learn quite a lot about someone’s interest and motivation from things like:

- body language
- how they speak
- how they’ve completed their application form
- how they dress for the interview
- talking about personal achievements and experiences.

Giving feedback to potential learners on test results and interviews is all part of the process. Selection is about taking a professional view of how well someone is suited to a particular course of action. Staff carrying out the process should be ready to revise their views, if the way in which a person reacts to feedback provides new information about their suitability.

It’s important also to keep a written record of the outcomes of tests and interviews. It’s a reminder of why the judgement was made. And the information will be useful later, when completing a learner’s individual learning plan.

Make sure learners know what to expect

The selection process goes two ways. Employers and providers are selecting learners, and learners are making a positive choice about where they will work and learn.

At the selection stage, potential learners should be informed about some of the basics to do with learning, as well as with their jobs. They should know:

- what the learning involves and how long it lasts
- what the first stage of the learning will consist of
• what preparation (if any) they need to make
• who to contact with any problems or queries about their learning programme.

Some of this will be covered in induction, once a learner has been selected. But it’s good to provide a clear and consistent roadmap to learners so that they know where they are going at all times – even before they start – and who to turn to if they get lost.

Where and when?

Selection is a specific event, which may include a test and/or interview. It happens at a specific time and place.

There has to be enough time for employers and providers to find out what is needed in order to make a decision about the learner. And learners need time to find out more about the learning programme and review their choice. But it shouldn’t be a long, drawn-out process.

Selection events might take place on the employer’s premises. It’s a chance for the learner to look around and it’s convenient for the employer. If not, they might take place in a college, training centre or other suitable location.

Case studies and examples

Selection test

A national provider specialising in a particular branch of engineering has devised a standard selection test for all potential learners. The test is designed to identify applicants with the aptitude and potential to succeed in the Modern Apprenticeship framework, and to screen out those who are likely to fail.

Applicants are given a written scenario, similar to the kind of thing they may be dealing with in their apprenticeship. There are around 40 questions based on the information contained in the scenario. The questions test:

• applicants’ understanding of some basic concepts
• their ability to understand a question and interpret data
• their numeracy skills.

Applicants write their answers on an answer sheet, which is then marked. There is a standard pass mark. Applicants who score the pass mark or above are invited for an interview, those who score below are referred back to Connexions.

The selection test was carefully designed and piloted with several groups of applicants before being introduced.

Selecting with employers

Another sector-based provider has formed close relations with a network of employers in their sector. Most potential learners come directly from these employers, but the process of selecting them onto the right programme is far from automatic.
Staff spend time with employers discussing:

- what the employer needs the employee to do
- what jobs they currently carry out.

After this, each potential learner completes a job analysis questionnaire to find out more about their role in the company. The completed questionnaires are discussed and the learner identifies strong and weak areas. The information is used to help develop an individual learning plan, and this is then discussed with the employer.

**Resources**

Basic information on aptitude tests, occupational inventories and other psychometric tests can be found in a Resources Guide published by North Yorkshire Learning and Skills Council and available on the LSC website.

Information on screening tests for basic skills is available from the Basic Skills Agency on their website.

**Stay in touch**

- www.basic-skills.co.uk
- www.lsc.goc.uk

**Checklist**

- How well does your organisation’s selection process enable you to distinguish between
  - applicants who know what they want to do and are well informed
  - those who are less well informed and may have unrealistic expectations?

- What methods are used to find out about potential learners’ abilities and aspirations?
- How effective are these methods?

- Do you provide enough information to potential learners at the selection stage?

- Is there enough time to carry out a thorough selection process?
- Is the process done in a suitable, convenient environment?