

Cambridge Regional College

Provider Case Study

This Provider case study describes how Cambridge Regional College made the move to providing ITQ to large and small employers in its area.



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Background

Cambridge Regional College (CRC) is a large FE college with around 20,000 students, including around 4000 16-18 year olds. They provide a variety of provision and have recently significantly expanded their courses in construction and hairdressing, as well as their work with public services.

Why ITQ?

The College operates a Learning Shop which is focussed on delivering ICT courses such as e-Equals and ECDL. Learners cover the whole range from 16-18s and “silver surfers” to those looking to return-to-work, or already in work. The Shop teaches around 1000 students each year, most part-time.

CRC had stopped offering the old NVQ in ICT several years ago. When it recently looked to start offering the NVQ again the College found that the qualification had been replaced by the new ITQ. Working through their City and Guilds ITQ contacts, their local e-Skills representative, and with nearby Huntingdonshire Community College (which had been involved in the ITQ pilot), the College rapidly came up to speed with ITQ.

Moving to ITQ

Cambridge Regional College was convinced from the start that the ITQ needed to be presented as a business qualification rather than an IT qualification. Working with eSkills and Huntingdonshire College they produced a set of collateral themed around “Technology for Business”, which played down the details of ICT and ITQ, but played up the business benefits of a better skilled workforce – especially in terms of productivity.

A formal business case had to be made to the College, but this was an easy sell once they realised that ITQ would become the focus of eSkills activity and LSC funding in the coming years.

The main gaps in the existing ICT team were around NVQ assessment skills, although the College already had its own IV to call on. ITQ was also found to be considerably easier than existing NVQs to deliver – given the modular nature, lightweight portfolio and replacement of a “performance criteria” approach with simple observation.

Existing ICT material was adapted for ITQ over a 3 month period to match the Level 1 and Level 2 requirements. Based around the “Technology for

Business” theme three seminars were held in the Spring of 2006 to build interest, and the colleges own Business Department and eSkills were used to generate early leads.

Delivering ITQ

ITQ delivery is fundamentally different to that for the College's existing e-quals and ECDL courses. Spiky profiles are designed for each role in consultation with the employer. The profile is built in “reverse order”, starting with the bespoke and sector modules, then applications and then the generic modules.

This approach has been vital to getting business buy-in as the businesses can quite clearly see what they are getting out of the training – staff trained to use the key applications in the business, and with the necessary supporting skills. In some ways the ITQ becomes “their training programme”, rather than just an external qualification.

An initial briefing session with the learners is followed by a number of combined coaching/ assessment visits. At each visit any gaps in knowledge are addressed, and the learner set 4 or 5 tasks to complete by the next visit. The number of visits depends on the ability and prior knowledge of the learner, but 2 to 3 to complete the ITQ has not been untypical. A lot of the College's ITQ students also already have Contributory Qualification modules which they can count against their ITQ – without having to re-learn or re-assess.

Portfolio's have been kept lean in the spirit of ITQ. CDs are used to provide some evidence, and there are plans to submit portfolios solely based around audio and video recording. No use has yet been made of e-Portfolio systems, but e-skills Passport is being used.

Working with Employers

Although some early attempts were made to engage with very large employers these have not been too successful since corporate headquarters have often proved a block to local or regional initiatives and Train To Gain contracts had not been approved at the time. That said the College has started delivering ITQs to Military and Civil Service staff, and work is still progressing with some of the large companies.

More successful have been approaches to larger SMEs. Working with an HR or training manager the case for ITQ can be readily made – particularly by linking it into the company's own systems and training requirements – and the authority is there to roll a programme out, as has been the case with Robert Sayles in Cambridge.

Spiky Profiles and Bespoke Units

The College has made significant use of the bespoke unit, with almost every delivery involving one. In many organisations more than one module needs to be developed to account for the different systems (and job roles) in the business. Modules have ranged from mainframe based inventory

systems to missile tracking systems used by the MOD.

Expert Witnesses have been key to delivering and assessing bespoke modules. Working with a company expert the College can create the assessment criteria for a bespoke system by reference to existing similar ITQ modules (eg Databases or Internet). The expert can then not only help coach the learners through any gaps in their knowledge but also then assess their performance as the Expert Witness. The important point is that the College staff do not have to become experts (or even trainers) themselves in the myriad of systems they encounter. However the staff are exposed to a wide range of commercial applications and uses of technology – which can itself have wider benefits.

Although it hasn't been an issue yet there are some concerns that data and business confidentiality issues may need to be more formally addressed when doing bespoke units.

Funding

The majority of ITQs so far have been funded under mainstream FE arrangements. Work has started on Train To Gain but identifying potential learners without any Level 2 equivalent is proving hard – and as a result costly.

The Results

CRC has successfully delivered ITQ to employees in a range of companies. The challenge so far has been to get significant numbers from each

employer. However a recent success has seen 10 learners enrolled at Robert Sayles Cambridge (part of the John Lewis Partnership), and bespoke units are being developed for them covering their till, stock and ordering systems. There are also a further 20 students either completing or who have finished their ITQ from the Civil Service.

More Information

John Pritchard, who runs Cambridge Regional College's ITQ programme can be contacted at 01223 418343 or jpritchard@mail.camre.ac.uk

The CRC web site is at: <http://www.camre.ac.uk/>

Lessons Learnt

As far as Cambridge Regional College is concerned bespoke modules are the “big thing” of ITQ. They enable the qualification to “give something back to the company”, rather than just training users on generic applications that they may not even use at work. They let the College “put the company into the qualification”. And by making sure that the ITQ profile matches what the user does, the learner gets a lot out of the qualification too.

Giving the marketing of ITQ a business improvement focus has also paid dividends. Employers don't just approach it as yet another IT course, but see it as a real opportunity to improve employee skills, and business productivity, in key areas of the business.

Most of all employers, providers and learners need to realise that ITQ is about technology, not just computers. So any information technology system used at work (including hand-held computers and even Point-of-Sale terminals) could be included in an ITQ.