



**Skillsmark**

*Rewarding excellence  
in the justice sector*

# Skillsmark / Case Studies



# Introduction

The purpose of Skillsmark is to provide a quality mark for use within the Justice sector. This quality mark is awarded to recognise those providers who meet the evaluation requirements of Skillsmark.

Skillsmark is a two-step accreditation process that recognises providers and endorses programmes and courses of learning. Through Skillsmark employers can identify those courses and programmes that meet their needs.



When employers in the Justice sector became dissatisfied with training provision bought in from outside their organisations, they realised that something had to change. Developing a quality mark to guarantee excellence seemed the ideal solution. Since the employers lacked the resources to take the idea forward themselves, Skills for Justice took up the challenge. In consultation with employers, they developed Skillsmark to create an accreditation scheme that enables employers to identify more easily education and training programmes that meet their business needs – with a payback in terms of improved service, better productivity and the increased motivation that comes from an employer's investment in their staff.

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# Case study 1: Blackburn College

**Blackburn College is a large mixed economy college offering a wide range of education and training. It has a significant number of Higher Education (HE) programmes and works in collaboration with several universities.**

HE provision is in a dedicated building branded as the East Lancashire Institute of Higher Education (ELIHE). One of its four schools, the School of Social Sciences and Humanities, offers HE programmes related to the Justice sector.

## Why Skillsmark?

Going for Skillsmark was an obvious step for the College, as Foundation Degree Course Leader, Phil Johnson, explains:

**“Having Skillsmark means that agencies within the sector can have confidence in our delivery. It’s a mark for quality and definitely adds weight to our profile. It’s great for staff morale too and recognises their achievement.”**

## Fast tracking

The College applied for Skillsmark as a ‘fast track’ application, so recognition relates to programmes that lead to qualifications of a recognised Awarding Body. As an Associate College of the University of Lancaster, the College is evaluated by the University, which is itself subject to the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) institutional audit arrangements – in the most recent institutional audit, for example, the QAA judgement was ‘broad confidence’. QAA reviewers had ‘confidence’ in the quality of learning opportunities provided for students. This existing rigorous quality assurance meant that the Skillsmark process was faster than the usual route – and very straightforward. The evidence the College submitted for Skillsmark, including QAA and external examiners’ reports along with details of links with employers, confirmed suitability for Skillsmark recognition. Says Phil Johnson:

**“We were able to bypass a large part of the normal procedure, which cut down on the administration dramatically. Because we already had in place the quality safeguards of both the University of Lancaster and QAA, there really was minimal hassle.”**

- **Blackburn College is the 12th largest general and Further Education college based on Learning and Skills Council LSC income and the 5th largest Further Education college funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).**
- **Within the 19+ age range, around 23% of learners are studying at Level 4.**

## Endorsement

The programme submitted for Skillsmark endorsement was the BA Honours in Criminology (Foundation Degree (FdA) Route), which is validated by the University of Lancaster. It's a three year programme with exit points and progression points at the end of years one and two. If learners want to leave at the end of year one, providing they have met the assessment requirements, they will be awarded a Certificate in Higher Education. Similarly, at the end of year two, learners can exit with the FdA in Criminology and Criminal Justice. The target group includes people working within the Criminal Justice System as well as those who want to make a career within the sector. There's an emphasis on work-based or work-related learning in the course. Teaching and learning strategies are designed to allow for the transfer of learning between the different units and the integration of theory and work-based or work-related activities. Employers are closely involved in design and delivery.

A QAA review of the FdA had already demonstrated that QAA reviewers have 'confidence' in the emerging academic standards and achievements of students. The College showed how they used the relevant National Occupational Standards (NOS) and how they met the requirements of the Skills for Justice Foundation Degree Framework. Consequently, little more needed to be done for programme endorsement other than sending off the relevant documents. Says Phil:

**"We had to show how we had worked with employers and how we applied the knowledge and understanding specified in the National Occupational Standards. The Skillsmark team cross-referenced what we'd sent against their own benchmarks and then came to visit for a day to meet the team and some of our employer consultants."**



The employer consultants, members of the Employer Forum for Criminal Justice, showed that employers are actively involved with the design, delivery and evaluation of the programmes. At the same time, some learning outcomes were reviewed and amended at the meeting in line with current requirements. The link between the College and this group is critical for embedding the work-based or work-related elements of the programme. These employers can offer opportunities for volunteering activities to provide learners with access to the workplace. Examples of links include young offender institutions, community safety partnerships and applying to become a special constable. Some of the employers also deliver learning within the programme and at least one takes part in the assessment of presentations. Employers are involved in mentoring learners and when learners are identifying areas for research, employers are encouraged to commission research projects with them.

## The benefits

The benefits of Skillsmark are already becoming clear. There's been a significant impact on staff morale and motivation as their quality is recognised both inside and beyond the College. It was a short step to Skillsmark recognition and the subsequent programme endorsement. Says Phil Johnson:

"We heard in a matter of weeks that we'd been successful in getting recognition and shortly after, submitted our programmes for endorsement. The Skillsmark team are very helpful – it's a very efficient process. We'd like to think that Skillsmark has already affected student enrolments. Numbers have already gone up massively – they trebled in the first year of our having Skillsmark – and the quality of the course is very likely to be an influencing factor. We're very pleased with how it's gone."

## Employer feedback

"For the Criminology Department at ELIHE to become a Skillsmark recognised provider with endorsed programmes makes sense to me as Skills for Justice have always actively canvassed the views of employers. Myself and a range of other professionals were involved heavily in establishing the FdA's content and meet regularly to see that this course and its top-up programme, the BA in Criminology, evolve to meet the fluctuating demands of the workplace. My own organisation has benefited too thanks to the research myself, Phil Johnson and the criminology students have undertaken into the delivery of the Community Payback scheme. This research has been subsequently published in the Probation Journal."

Bill Ingram, Quality Assurance Manager,  
National Probation Service Lancashire.

"Numbers have already gone up massively – they trebled in the first year of our having Skillsmark..."



## Student feedback

“My experience was that the FdA Criminology and Criminal Justice course was easily accessible and flexible in its approach. It has definitely widened the opportunities for my personal and professional development. The course was both enjoyable and challenging and I know that it will benefit my future career.”

Rebecca Miller, Reintegration Special Support Assistant (Pupil Referral Unit), Blackburn.

“I believe the course provides a range of benefits, enabling me to fulfil the role of my current job alongside studying. The course involves the development of work-based learning, therefore helping me to substantially improve my skills in the workplace and the whole Criminal Justice System. Through the inclusion of a voluntary work placement and the application of the course, I have been able to progress both professionally and academically, creating a strong foundation for my future career.”

Heidi Jackson, Police Communications Operator, Burnley.

“I have found the FdA Criminology and the BA Criminology course to be extremely interesting and enjoyable. The course has helped me develop in areas including reading, writing, presentation, research and critical analysis. The skills acquired have had an immense impact upon my life. I have developed not only on an academic level but also professionally and socially. I have an increased confidence and a greater understanding and interest in the contemporary issues of today. This course has also been invaluable for my recent career change from general office work to working within the Criminal Justice System.”

Rachel Skinner, Vulnerable and Intimidated Witness Officer, Lancashire Victim Support.



## Case study 2:

# Prison Service College, National Tactical Response Group (NTRG)

**The National Tactical Response Group delivers highly regarded specialist operational training relating to the use of force and the resolution of incidents across England and Wales. They run around 190 courses each year between two centres.**

There are 13 different courses – 10 Use of Force courses for Her Majesty's Prison Service (HMPS) and selected Criminal Justice and Military agencies, and three bespoke courses exclusive to the NTRG national trainers to maintain their operational competence and accreditation. The majority of the courses are competence-based and designed to meet Prison Service Orders 1600 and 1400 and Prison Service Standards 61 and 26. The curricula support and inform operational decision making and improve safety during violent or potentially violent incidents.

A particular logistical challenge is that, in parallel to their training role, the NTRG national instructors are also responsible for providing the lead specialist response to prison incidents throughout England and Wales, ready to attend incidents at the drop of a hat. Nevertheless, a high volume of training is delivered, despite the additional demands of leading the operational responses to incidents.

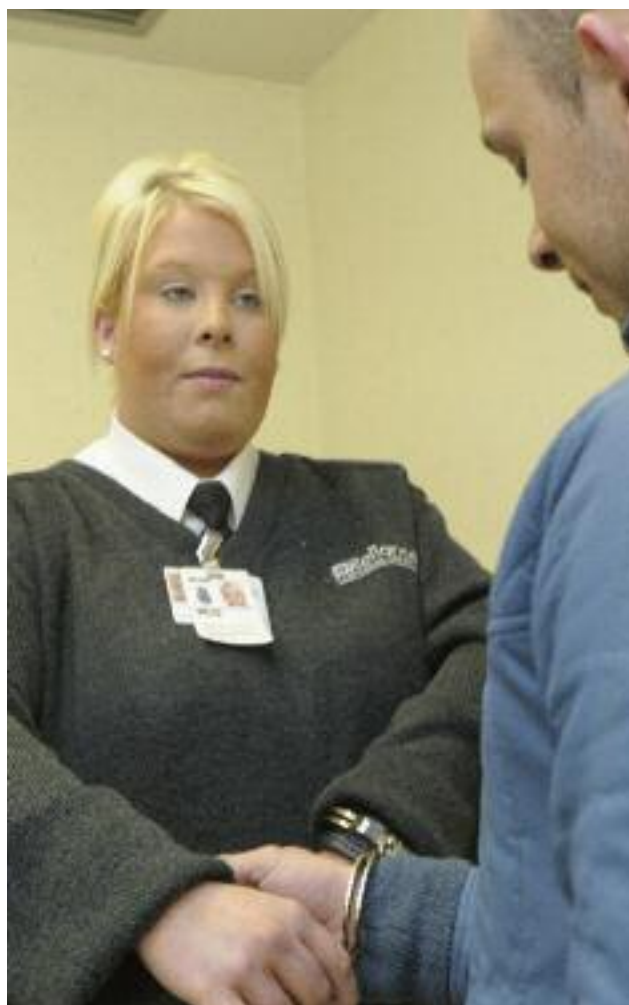
The National Tactical Response Group is located at two centres: Kidlington in Oxfordshire and Hatfield Woodhouse in South Yorkshire, covering south and north of the Prison Service estate respectively. The NTRG is a satellite facility operating under the direction of Training Services based at the Prison Service College, Newbold Revel. The Head of the NTRG Centres (Governor) provides the strategic guidance to the Prison Service Management Board on training and development issues and is responsible for the delivery of staff training. Each Centre has a Head of Centre (Deputy Governor) as its manager, assisted by Principal Officers, Senior Officers, Officers and Support Staff.



## Why Skillsmark?

High staff morale, enthusiasm and commitment are very evident at the NTRG and this is reflected in the views of learners. Being able to recognise that through a nationally respected quality mark was ideal, so it's no surprise that going for Skillsmark had been fundamental to the NTRG's vision. Andy Ripley, Deputy Governor, took over responsibility for Skillsmark when he joined the organisation in July 2007, with Skillsmark endorsement as one of the objectives on his personal development plan:

**"We wanted to become nationally recognised and Skillsmark fitted exactly. It was just what we wanted. The NTRG started the ball rolling in December 2006 before I arrived and began to go through the process towards recognition. We weren't successful the first time round as there were still a couple of gaps to be filled. But its rigour is a mark of the high quality of Skillsmark – and the support from the Skillsmark team to help you through the process is phenomenal. After consultation with them when I arrived last summer, I got our team together and we broke their feedback into bite-sized chunks, looking at where**



**we were and where we needed to get more evidence. We were assessed again a few months later and the Skillsmark team were more than happy that we ticked all of the boxes. So in December 2007 we became Skillsmark recognised."**

## The benefits of Skillsmark

Leadership at the NTRG is inclusive and open, with everyone having equal opportunity for their opinions to be heard and valued. There's a real sense of responsibility to and for each other, generated by the operational demands of the role but also by the leadership style at the two centres. Staff feel involved and supported. Skillsmark has served to strengthen this approach, recognising and reinforcing the strong team spirit among staff, the good communications and the sense of operating as one team across two sites. The logical next step after recognition was to go for Skillsmark endorsement of courses. Andy explains:

"I got the team together again, along with the Quality Assurance (QA) and curriculum development people, to look at getting all of our courses through an internal process to ensure they are fit for purpose, progressing to Skillsmark endorsement. Currently five courses are going through the internal process, with course descriptors written and mapped

against National Occupational Standards (NOS). The learning outcomes have been fantastic, since courses are built around the course descriptors. We've been able to benchmark with other Skillsmark organisations too – Malcolm Grant from the Scottish Prison Service, for example, has been really helpful.

Control and Restraint is just a very small part of training in the Prison Service. Although we have just 21 instructors, we train around 5,000 people a year. Skillsmark has real currency – we're recognised as a quality provider of training. It's given the training department a big lift. I came in knowing nothing about Skillsmark. Our first course will soon go through the Skillsmark endorsement process. We acknowledge the support that the Skillsmark team has provided.

**"Excellent tutors and the course was built up well, building people's confidence."**





## Learner feedback

The help and advice they've given us has been really welcome and they made the process run very smoothly. At the end of the day, we have to produce the evidence to show what we're doing so that we can get accreditation. And that's how it should be – it's a top quality, recognised mark, so it shouldn't be too easy to achieve. This way, there's more benefit when you gain it. I am pleased with the help they've given us and what we've been able to achieve."

"Excellent tutors and the course was built up well, building people's confidence."

"This course makes you aware of the bigger picture. Good course delivered at a level that's relevant to me and what I'm expected to do at my establishment."

"The course was of a very high standard as expected. Definitely the best and most useful course I have been on."



## Case study 3: Ilex Tutorial College (ITC)

**Skillsmark came at just the right time for ILEX Tutorial College (ITC). They were keen to gain recognition for the quality of their products and services. A national, well respected quality mark was the ideal solution.**

ITC is the legal training college of the Institute of Legal Executives (ILEX). It provides off-the-shelf open and distance learning law and legal practice courses for trainee legal executives (public courses) and customised open and distance learning courses for public sector and corporate clients (bespoke courses), with induction and study days for customers on request. Students are given access to an online legal database and the student website, tutor support by email and telephone support from the academic team and the Business Manager, Jenny Pelling. ITC has 33 employees and around 100 freelance tutors who have a spread of academic and practical expertise and are assigned to courses on the basis of their expertise. Tutors are selected using a set of criteria which includes a law qualification, plus an educational qualification and teaching experience as desirables.

### Gaining recognition

Building a portfolio of evidence for Skillsmark recognition was the first phase of the process. The design of ITC's open and distance learning materials and the quality of its tutoring are managed through its editorial team and evaluated through continued dialogue with customers and student surveys. Public and bespoke courses and associated open and distance learning materials are developed in consultation with customers to meet their needs. So ITC were confident that the quality was there – they simply had to evidence it for the Skillsmark team, as Jenny Pelling explains:

**“The Skillsmark team were great. They identified any gaps in our portfolio which needed to be filled and were very supportive and helpful. We were invited to several face-to-face meetings and feedback sessions with them and they were always there at the end of the phone or email if we wanted them – supportive, cheerful, encouraging and enthusiastic.”**



## Going for Skillsmark endorsement

ITC has always taken great care with the design and delivery of their courses. Their courses for Crown Prosecution Service caseworkers and Criminal Justice Police staff are based on the knowledge requirements of a Caseworker National Occupational Standard. Open and distance learning makes ITC courses accessible to students who are unable to attend face-to-face tuition for work, health or family reasons and for those who are visually impaired, ITC is able to print materials in 14 point.

The rigorous Skillsmark endorsement process encompasses questions on delivery, flexibility and how providers can accommodate students with special learning needs alongside other criteria in a structured framework based on question and answer. ITC initially went for endorsement of two courses: the Certificate in Criminal Administration and the Certificate in Criminal Prosecution, as Jenny explains:

**“These are the two major courses in the Justice sector. The recognition phase of Skillsmark looked at the whole company, which involves sourcing a wide range of information. By the time we reached the endorsement stage, we were very familiar with the type of evidence the Skillsmark team required. After only a few months we’d been awarded recognition and endorsement and received the Skillsmark plaque at the Skills for Justice annual Skills Summit.”**



## The benefits

Jenny has no hesitation in emphasising the benefits of going for Skillsmark:

**“It’s hugely rewarding for us to have Skillsmark. It’s invaluable for independent organisations like us, a private not-for-profit training provider. We have our own professional body behind us and now recognition of the quality and relevance of our courses from a Sector Skills Council (SSC). Customers quickly have confidence in us as a result. It’s a shorthand for quality. When I talk to clients about what we do and whether our training is applicable to their staff, Skillsmark gives me credibility. People aren’t wary – they’re impressed. Skillsmark is a fast track to commanding trust.”**

## Case study 4:

# Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) Crime Academy

The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) Crime Academy's core business is to train detectives in the varied roles they perform and also those whose roles support the work of the detective, and to meet key service objectives relating to tackling crime and bringing offenders to justice.

Its vision is 'to be the world leader for training investigators with the knowledge, skills and related specialist techniques to reduce crime and pursue and bring to justice those who break the law'.

The MPS Crime Academy currently offers 69 different courses to nearly 7,000 students annually, encompassing the disciplines of crime detection, intelligence, crime analysis, forensics, investigation and the presentation of evidence.

The MPS Crime Academy was established in 2003 following the merger of the Detective Training School, the Forensic Scientific Support College, the Analyst Training Unit and the Holmes Unit to meet increased demand for specialist training in the Metropolitan Police Service.

There are currently ten faculties within the Academy: Criminal Justice, Forensics, Holmes, Intelligence, Investigative, Senior Investigative, Specialist, Counter Terrorism, Disaster Victim Identification and Covert Policing.

## Quality marking excellence

The Crime Academy has robust and effective systems and procedures for the design, delivery and evaluation of training, with clear direction through the mission statement and associated objectives supported by appropriate systems and procedures. There's a strong commitment to quality assurance, customer focus and continuous improvement, and customers are involved in the design and evaluation of training. New courses are initially delivered through a pilot phase and are evaluated before being made widely available, and many of the Crime Academy's courses lead to a recognised qualification and include formal assessment. Quality marking the excellence of their training was a logical move for the Academy. When Linda Brownlow, Deputy Head of the Forensic Faculty, first came across the work of Skills for Justice and Skillsmark, she was impressed by what she saw:

“I saw right away that Skillsmark filled a need and that there was a real impetus for it in the sector. I was convinced this was the direction we should be going within the Crime Academy. Skillsmark is so relevant to the training that we do. It’s focused, for example, on National Occupational Standards (NOS), which are key to us as all of our roles are based on the Integrated Competency Framework (ICF). It made absolute sense that Skillsmark was something we could – and should – do. And as Quality Assurance Manager at the time, I was particularly keen to start the ball rolling.”

Linda discussed her proposal with the Academy’s Director, Detective Chief Superintendent (DCS) Steve Lovelock, who gave an enthusiastic go ahead for Linda and her colleagues to get started:

“We were an early implementer of Skillsmark, deciding to put ourselves forward for accreditation in just the Forensic Faculty to start with. We began by mapping where we already met the criteria and submitting an initial report. It meant looking carefully at all our management processes, documentation and policy processes and gathering evidence to show that we had robust, best practice policies and processes in place for managing training. That structure underpins our quality.”



## Going for Skillsmark recognition

The recognition stage of Skillsmark is not a two-minute exercise – but the Skillsmark team is there to offer support whenever it’s needed:

“The Skillsmark team were excellent. I can’t praise them highly enough – we certainly couldn’t have done it without their help. We began to put together the documentation for recognition, demonstrating how we can conform to the management process. For example, we use a structured process of performance needs analysis, identifying why the training is required, followed by a detailed customer needs analysis to ensure that the training we offer fits the need exactly. Our documentation processes show exactly how the training is progressed, how it becomes integrated into the training programme and how it is subsequently delivered.”



## Course endorsement

Gaining recognised status was a satisfying achievement. But before the Forensic Faculty could use the logo, they needed to have at least one course endorsed:

**"We decided to get the whole of the National Fingerprint Examiner (NFE) and the Assistant Forensic Practitioner (AFP) training endorsed. We had to look at each element of these courses, at the nuts and bolts of the aims and objectives, to show that they had value outside the MPS in the Criminal Justice landscape as well as in the MPS itself. We have now been successful in achieving Skillsmark endorsement for all of the courses that we put forward."**

All training at the Academy is underpinned by a performance needs analysis and business groups are actively involved in sponsoring and signing off new design projects. For example, the AFP programme responds to a specific operational need. It comprises of a series

of modules aimed at equipping new members of the MPS to become competent crime scene examiners. The AFP programme was developed in 2002 in response to the Home Office's DNA Expansion Programme, which identified a need for improved performance around the retrieval and subsequent use of DNA from 'volume' crime scenes such as burglary and motor vehicle crime. The programme is based upon the crime scene examination NOS and the MPS trainer training programme is based upon the learning and development NOS. Aims, objectives and learning outcomes are set for each module and then specified for each lesson within each lesson plan.

When learners have successfully completed the AFP Foundation course they have the knowledge and skills to attend 'volume' crime scenes. However these new examiners continue to be supported and mentored by their experienced colleagues back in the workplace so that they build the confidence to examine crime scenes on their own. As they progress in their careers they return to the Academy for further developmental courses enabling them to move on to become Forensic Practitioners and Senior Forensic Practitioners in turn.

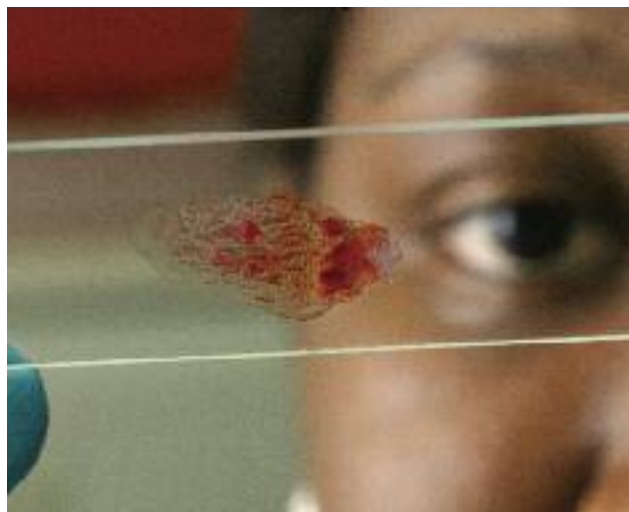
**" By the end of the process, we were happy that we were meeting both the Skillsmark and the MPS standards for quality training."**



The NFE training programme is targeted at new MPS Police service employees (entry level Police staff) and all Police and agency fingerprint examiners. The nine modules build together to furnish both new members of the MPS and others from within the Criminal Justice/Law Enforcement sector with the knowledge, skills and expertise to attain Fingerprint Expert status. Between modules learners practise their skills and are supported by a work-based mentor.

The Forensic Faculty has been delivering this prestigious programme in this form since 2002, having been established primarily to equip professionals for the work carried out in the Fingerprint Bureau at New Scotland Yard. The relevant NOS are clearly visible to all learners and the learning outcomes are set in accordance with the national standards laid down by the National Fingerprint Board. The main employer is the MPS Directorate of Forensic Services (SCD4) and representatives of this directorate are involved in all aspects of the programme from design to evaluation.

The rigorous Skillsmark requirements have helped the Faculty identify areas that needed amendment so they could ensure that every aspect was up to standard:



**“It allowed us to health check our processes, giving us a valuable framework from which we could take a more holistic, structured approach to our internal review processes. The Skillsmark questions, for example, enabled us to go through every aspect methodically and identify where we could change to improve. By the end of the process, we were happy that we were meeting both the Skillsmark and MPS standards for quality training.”**



## Skillsmark benefits

Linda is enthusiastic about the benefits of Skillsmark:

“It is a very in-depth process, which reflects the quality of Skillsmark. There’s now a great deal of kudos attached to our courses. We have a lot of external partners working with us and it’s clear from what they have said that employers and learners want the Skillsmark courses in particular. Partners ask us how we achieved the accreditation as their other customers are already enquiring whether they too intend to become Skillsmark accredited. It’s perceived as a mark that ensures quality – it’s as simple as that.”

But the benefits of achieving Skillsmark haven’t just been about customer trust, vital though that is. The Skillsmark process has brought its own rewards:

“Once we started working to gain the accreditation, the benefits quickly became clear. The rigorous process of recognition meant that we pulled apart and examined the courses, formally writing down what we did already, adding in extra elements where necessary and ensuring that we delivered top quality. Our staff too have been very appreciative of the mechanism, bringing quality to the fore in their minds, making them more focused and aware of how they should be working. It is now common for managers to ask whether their plans for new approaches to training would be acceptable for Skillsmark. It’s raising our game all the time. It’s been a big morale booster, since it’s shown us what good processes we have in place.”

“ It’s a very in-depth process, which reflects the quality of Skillsmark.”



## Looking ahead

Skillsmark proved such a success that the recognition was extended to the rest of the Crime Academy:

“The Director saw the improvements that had been made in the Forensic Faculty as a result of working towards Skillsmark and wanted to ensure that level of quality for the rest of the Academy. As a result we compiled a final report for extended recognition and worked closely with the Skillsmark team. They came out for a day and reviewed the evidence that wasn’t movable (such as a specially adapted classroom) and interviewed senior management, training managers, trainers and students. Because we’d been through such a thorough overhaul for the initial stages of Skillsmark, the staff were able to explain exactly what their processes were and why they were used – they really understood the strategy behind what they did. Just going through the process improved the quality of what we were delivering. We also became more focused

on partnership working with the customer. The design and delivery of training has always had to meet high standards in this respect, but the Skillsmark process highlighted where we could improve even further. Now, for instance, we’ve started to invite partners to review the courses more regularly, to ensure that they are always fit for purpose as situations change.

We were awarded Skillsmark recognition for the whole Crime Academy in December 2007. It was hard work but well worth it. It’s been very well received in the MPS – the senior management are impressed with what we’ve achieved. It’s a huge feather in our cap.”

Indeed Assistant Commissioner John Yates, Head of the Specialist Crime Directorate at New Scotland Yard, recently highlighted the importance he attaches to the achievement, describing the award of Skillsmark to the Crime Academy as “excellent news”.



## Case study 5:

# Prison Service College of Physical Education (PE)

The Prison Service College of Physical Education delivers specialist physical education training for Prison Officers under the direction of Training Services, which is part of Shared Services. The senior management team within Training Services provides the strategic guidance to the Prison Service Management Board on training and development issues and is responsible for the delivery of staff training. The training meets the needs of the Prison Service and the wider agenda of the National Offender Management Service.

## Tailored programmes

The College's programmes are designed to train Prison Officers to be Prison PE Officers through initial training and Continuing Professional Development (CPD). The curriculum design and content are endorsed by PE policy leads and the Quality Assurance Department (QuAD). The self-assessment report process is also endorsed by the Quality Assurance Board.

The College is well equipped for delivering high-quality education and training and the whole team is fully engaged in the process of reviewing and managing performance. Going for Skillsmark was a perfect fit, as Sue Parkin, Governor, Head of Physical Education Training, explains:

**"Within Training Services we're always looking at external benchmarks and examples of best practice. We want to be as good as we can possibly be. When we heard about Skillsmark, we knew it was definitely for us. It's the first time that there has been recognition for training providers in the Justice sector. Skillsmark shows anyone who wants to undertake training that it is fit for purpose. Our aim is always to stay ahead of the game – Skillsmark gave us an opportunity to do that."**



## Skillsmark recognition

The first stage of the Skillsmark process is to go for Skillsmark recognition. For Sue and her team, it couldn't have been easier:

**"The College works with a number of Awarding Bodies, so we already had structures in place to cover a systems and Quality Assurance (QA) audit. We used those to provide the evidence, simply repackaging them to answer the Skillsmark questions, and received Skillsmark**

**recognition in April 2007. It was actually a very enjoyable task – not at all onerous – because it's real for us. We provide quality training, supporting learners to demonstrate competence and knowledge in an innovative adult learning environment. For me, it's recognition from a totally independent organisation that we're already doing a good job."**

## Skillsmark endorsement

Once they'd received Skillsmark recognition, the College then began the process for course endorsement for all of their training. The major programme designed and delivered by the PE College is the 15-week Initial Training Course, which provides training in four key areas: regime delivery, resettlement, offending behaviour and education. PE staff must be able to deliver safe and effective programmes and contribute towards Prison Service Standards, Key Performance Targets and Service Delivery Agreements. The learning from this curriculum leads to learners achieving a range of qualifications and coaching awards that meet the requirements of the various lead bodies related to sport. The programme has a very high success rate with 210 of the last 216 learners completing the course having fully achieved all of the relevant qualifications.

The Physical Education Staff Development Courses are for Prison Officers who have previously completed the PE Officer Training Course and are acting as Physical Education Officers (PEOs) in prison establishments.

The purpose of these courses is to develop the knowledge, competence and skills of PEOs through CPD to enhance the PE programmes of prison establishments. The College's CPD programmes are run throughout the year, identified by PE advisers and establishments and approved by the QA team. This provides a continual learning path and specific progression for staff to enable them to extend their knowledge further and develop establishment programmes. All training programmes meet the Learning and Development Strategy. They are matched to relevant National Occupational Standards (NOS) or an individual sport's governing body requirements. Says Sue:

**“ It's a very in-depth process, which reflects the quality of Skillsmark.”**



“We run three 15-week courses each year, with between seven and nine Lead/Awarding Bodies, so our staff are very well qualified. Skillsmark is the cherry on the top. For us it’s fantastic, especially in terms of contestability – this is an opportunity to put a stamp on the fact that our training has a specific emphasis on being appropriate to the prison environment, covering issues such as changing lifestyle, behaviour and attitudes to contribute to reducing reoffending.

Having Skillsmark shows that we are a quality training provider for the Prison sector. We’ve already had a good few accolades – a National Training Award (NTA) Commendation, for instance, which was tremendous – and this is on the same scale. The staff have really appreciated the acknowledgement of the hard work they do. Other areas within Training Services have congratulated us on our achievement and we’re now supporting them through the same process.”



## Case study 6:

# Victim Support Scotland

### Skillsmark is the only quality mark for providers of training and education to the Justice sector.

Skillsmark is awarded to organisations who have gone through a rigorous assessment process and have been recognised as providing high quality learning programmes, relevant to the needs of the Justice sector.

Liv Cockburn is Head of Training at Victim Support Scotland. They recently obtained Skillsmark recognition and here Liv offers a unique insight into the process:

“When I first looked at the glossy brochure outlining what achieving Skillsmark entailed, my first thought was ‘not too bad.’ How foolish I was! I won’t lie, there is a lot of work involved in pulling together an application, but what I will say is that the benefits outweigh the drawbacks and the process has ultimately ensured that all of our learning and development systems are fit for purpose.”

Liv advises anyone contemplating Skillsmark to firstly sit down with a member of Skills for Justice :

“We were lucky to have a Workforce Development Advisor (WDA) from Skills for Justice on hand to provide information on what would be required. It was helpful to be able to work through the application form with the WDA and identify the evidence that we could use to support the application. It became obvious during this process that there were gaps in relation to our quality assurance, for example in evaluation. Identifying these problems before starting on the application helped to improve our procedures.”



The Skillsmark process requires organisations to look carefully at their materials, policies and procedures in order to ensure that they are robust and fit-for-purpose. Liv says:

**“I may have given the impression that achieving Skillsmark is an onerous task, however the benefits are immeasurable.”**

Skillsmark recognition publicly demonstrates that Victim Support Scotland

- has a professional approach to education and training
- has appropriate management processes, procedures and quality assurances in place
- develops learning programmes that meet the needs of Justice sector employers and are based on National Occupational Standards.

Benefits to Victim Support staff include

- the opportunity to celebrate success
- a shared goal for the organisation
- maintenance of high standards.

Victim Support Scotland is the second organisation and the first voluntary organisation to achieve this award in Scotland. Liv concludes:

**“Skills for Justice employees, both in Scotland and Sheffield, were very supportive throughout the process. They aim to make it as painless as possible, so remember to ask for help when you need it.”**



## Case study 7: Scottish Prison Service College

Malcolm Grant is Head of Training Standards at the Scottish Prison Service College (SPSC), the organisation responsible for the design and delivery of all prison staff training in Scotland. National Occupational Standards (NOS) are at the heart of the training SPSC provides. Malcolm believes that basing training on NOS standardises the courses and, as a direct consequence, staff performance.

For many years SPSC has strived to ensure that it met the highest quality standards, and has long held badges of quality such as IIP (Investors in People) and others.

When Skills for Justice first advertised for early implementers of Skillsmark, its new training and development quality mark back in 2005, Malcolm knew he wanted to be involved:

**"It was clear from the outset that Skillsmark was a robust quality assurance framework and we felt it was very timely and relevant. What's more, the fact that it asked for learning programmes to be based on NOS, meant that it very much tied in with our existing thinking."**

Skillsmark is the only quality mark to focus solely on training and development within the Justice sector. It is awarded to learning providers who have gone through a rigorous assessment process and have been recognised as providing high quality learning programmes, relevant to the needs of the Justice sector.

SPSC first gained Skillsmark recognition back in November 2005 and was among the first tranche of Skillsmark recognised providers to receive their awards at the official Skillsmark launch in March 2006.

Getting to that stage was no easy task – Malcolm needed to get staff and stakeholders on board. To do this he had to communicate what he was trying to achieve, and what was going to be required in order to achieve it. He says:



**“Staff buy-in was vitally important. After all, we were talking about making changes to procedures and ways of working and at the end of the day, these were the people who were going to be carrying all of that out day-to-day.”**

It didn't take long to get everyone on board and in order to get ready for their review, SPSC put in a significant amount of work to realign existing business practices to increase their effectiveness and efficiency.

Following their success in achieving recognised provider status, SPSC soon moved on to the next stage. They have, so far, submitted five of their programmes for Skillsmark endorsement and have been successful each time.

The programmes are

- Custodial Care SVQ Learning Programme
- A1 Assessor Programme
- A2 Assessor Programme
- Local Negotiators Training Course
- GPASS Disease Register (GDR Course).

So what's next for SPSC? Well they're already working on their next submission, a staff IT training programme. Malcolm says:

**“We've benefited from our involvement in Skillsmark in many ways. It has prompted us to consolidate and improve business practices and provided a focus for management on quality assurance.**

**Most importantly we have adopted a process that requires us to constantly strive to improve.”**

## Acknowledgements

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