



## **The Reflection Toolkit**

**[http://LabSpace.open.ac.uk/Reflection\\_2\\_1.0](http://LabSpace.open.ac.uk/Reflection_2_1.0) :**

**early reflections on its usage at Bridges  
Programmes**

## **Report**

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## **Foreword**

Bridges has long been aware of the value of Reflection in recognising and giving value to prior learning and work experience of our client base.

Throughout our courses we have used various reflective exercises with great success, so it was a natural development of that work, to partner with the Open University's expertise in this area and to co-develop a Reflection Toolkit, which accurately mirrored the experiences, hopes and aspirations of the people we support.

Bridges uses the toolkit at critical times of transition for our clients. Moving to a new country is often the time to re-asses priorities and to learn to make new goals. The Reflection Toolkit is extremely strong on this.

Furthermore, as our remit is support for employability training and education, the relevant sections in the toolkit with links to external pages gives clients essential information and advice all in one place.

We have so much faith in the toolkit that we are actively supporting other agencies to take it up, and, if we can, we will be taking it to Europe as part of knowledge exchange programmes helping European colleagues develop similar resources for themselves. Bridges and the OU in Scotland have been working together for many years. The Reflection Toolkit is just one more excellent example of that collaborative partnership.

Maggie Lennon, Director of Bridges Programmes

## **1. Introduction**

The following evaluative report was compiled using interviews with Reflection Toolkit facilitators and clients at Bridges Programmes: Life Skills Tutor Elaine Campbell, Case Workers Lynnda Wardle and Amanda Crawford, and Toolkit user Sami Alsamman and in consultation with Moira Dunworth, 'Open University at Bridges' Project Worker.

## **2. Overview**

A bespoke version of the Reflection Toolkit, entitled 'Reflecting on Transitions' [http://labspace.open.ac.uk/Reflection-2\\_1.0](http://labspace.open.ac.uk/Reflection-2_1.0) is used in a range of ways with Bridges' clients. either on a one to one basis or within or complimenting in-house courses at Bridges.

The Reflection Toolkit was incorporated into four weeks of the Life Skills (also known as JANCS – Joining A New Community) programme tutored by Elaine Campbell, with one session per week running for two hours over five weeks. Each of the five sections within the Reflection Toolkit module was used.

Alternatively, Case Workers use the Reflection Toolkit on an ongoing basis and Bridges have an intern who can also work with clients using it.

In the six months since its launch in April 2013, approximately twenty-five participants have used the Reflection Toolkit at Bridges, with around 80% completing it as part of an in-house course. Engaged users who do not need additional support complete it within the weeks of the course. All users complete it at some point.

Users were able to access the Reflection Toolkit on computers, in hard copy and on memory sticks. Delivery has been undertaken as a group, on a one-to-one basis and in pairs. Users have engaged with the Reflection Toolkit both on and off-site.

Bridges staff believe the Reflection Toolkit to have a "fantastic ethos" and there were no marked criticisms regarding the overall content or format of the resource.

### **3. Report Structure**

The following report presents the evaluative reflections on the usage of the Reflection toolkit, together with the benefits and issues raised by the interviewees.

Possible points for future developmental work either in relation to the content or delivery of the Reflection Toolkit at Bridges Programmes are signposted within each section, and the report concludes by presenting a summary of the key issues raised.

### **4. Tutor Feedback**

#### ***Group Delivery***

Group delivery of The Reflection Toolkit proved particularly problematic with the cohorts at Bridges, due to the personal content involved and speaking about this in the presence of others. Each participant had experienced a different journey to reach the UK and many of these journeys were harrowing. There were issues regarding gender, culture and age which caused the groups to be strongly non-homogenous (aside from the shared experience of all being on the Life Skills course). Gender in particular was considered to be a barrier to group discussion. This created a difficult to facilitate group environment based on personal roles and skills.

#### ***One-to-One and Paired Delivery***

Bridges are now working with Reflection Toolkit users on a one-to-one basis. Some users need intensive support from the facilitator due to varying levels of IT literacy.

The client's English language skills also have an impact on delivery. Considerable time can be taken up working on the Reflection Toolkit when there is a language barrier.

### ***Delivery Space***

Delivering the Reflection Toolkit online at Bridges is difficult due to limited IT facilities. IT facilities are not always available on site and there are only three laptops available. For this reason the paper-based version has primarily been used alongside USB memory sticks.

### ***Content: Appropriate Fit with Bridges Life Skills Course***

The ethos of the Reflection Toolkit is in synch with the nature of the Life Skills course. Being able to understand the personal journey and relevance of the past in the lives of the clients is highly relevant. The timeline feature (Activity 2.2) is an example of an aspect of the Reflection Toolkit that works especially well. It has a practical use relating to taking stock and the reflection here 'sinks in,' that is, the clients understand it in context.

At the end of the course or when use of the Reflection Toolkit has been completed, there is the opportunity for the facilitator to ask users what they feel they have learned. This enables clients to display that they have gained a better understanding of themselves. Prompting this discussion could be included in a resource for tutors to ensure uniform delivery across courses.

### ***Content: Introduction to the Reflection Toolkit***

To ensure that clients understand the purpose and structure of the Reflection Toolkit, staff spend time in the first session introducing it in context. It is easy for the facilitator to spend a whole session discussing its relevance with the users, rather than moving straight into Session 1. This introduction takes twice the amount of time

when there is a language barrier but the Introduction section of the Reflection Toolkit is otherwise not thoroughly read through<sup>1</sup> by users keen to get started.

It would be useful to have a simple, one page guide to the Reflection Toolkit and how to use it, to pass on to clients in this session. This would incorporate how to save activities and include notes on the more difficult to navigate sections. It could also highlight the difficult sections from a personal perspective: those which heighten vulnerability and address controversial matters. The language would need to be simpler, and succinct bullet points could be used.

***Content: External Resources / Improving User friendliness***

When using external resources, users need to learn the software first.

The Bubbl mind mapping tool (Session 2, Activity 2.2) was difficult for some users to get to grips with and more guidance is needed on how to save the results. It had to be understood first before it could be used, which was time intensive, particularly for users who had less experience of online software programs. Similarly the Bubbl spider diagram (Activity 2.4) takes time to navigate and practice.

*Development point: Contextualisation of the Bubbl tool and associated guidance to be included in the above 'guide' for users.*

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<sup>1</sup> *Anecdotal evidence from Moira Dunworth ('OU at Bridges' project worker and OU Associate Lecturer) notes that on some Bridges ESOL courses students are taught to skim read. There is some evidence from her work with students at Bridges that they skim read everything. What is reported here might be a reflection of that skim-reading culture, especially when something is written in an informal tone and seems 'easy', as OU materials at this level often do.*

## **5. Case Worker Feedback**

### ***Case Worker 1 - Lynnda Wardle***

#### ***On opportunities to use The Reflection Toolkit with Bridges clients***

*“It’s a great tool for people with leave to remain.”*

Case Worker Lynnda highlighted how the Reflection Toolkit could be used with clients who were not in the JANCS programme.

The fit in general matches that of the JANCS programme but the Reflection Toolkit may be more suitable for some clients than others. Not all clients are ready to take time to undertake deep reflection and background issues (e.g. housing, money) take precedence. Client stability needs to be established first in some cases. Being settled, that is having permanent leave to remain, has a major impact; at this stage the Reflection Toolkit works best.

Gender differences may impact upon group dynamics. The Reflection Toolkit may work well with women who are settled and who are working one-to-one with mentors who can draw out issues that are not likely to emerge in group work.

The Reflection Toolkit could also be used at the end of a Bridges Programmes training course (i.e. when a client had completed a university or college module/course). At this stage it could be used as part of a next steps/what next planning session. This would work well as it would give clients a recent experience to reflect on as they can tend to dismiss or not wish to think about prior experience as it was not in the UK. Conversely, this activity also works as a good way to prompt clients into using non-UK experience.



**Case Worker 2 – Amanda Crawford**  
**Reflecting on engaging users with employability skills**

*“It gives a realistic view of employment.”*

Case Worker Amanda found Session 3 to be of most relevance to her engagement with clients. When referring to work, the Reflection Toolkit helps to support a realistic view of employment. It may work well with those who are furthest from the labour market. The careers related information has no gaps and provides relevant links. The skills-related parts of the Reflection Toolkit work well with younger women, and tie in with the CV sessions that Case Workers run. The focus here is on re-entry to the labour market for the more vulnerable clients.

## **6. Client Feedback**

**S.A.**

***A personal review of the Reflection Toolkit***

*“Moving from country to country you need to coordinate yourself.”*

S used the Reflection Toolkit in its entirety during her time on the Life Skills course. She used the online version of the Reflection Toolkit, accessing it on a laptop at Bridges and in a library. S was introduced to the Reflection Toolkit as part of a group, and worked through it on her own. She estimates that it took her approximately 4 hours to complete all of the units.

Overall S found the Reflection Toolkit to be of great benefit. In particular she cited:

- Offering the opportunity to organise yourself
- Knowing what steps to take next
- Planning long-term and short-term goals

Barriers or difficulties that arose whilst working on the Reflection Toolkit:

- Language

- As English is not S's first language, she noted that it did take her more time to work through it, although her spoken English is fluent
- Repetition
  - While a question might be rephrased, the same answer was reached at different points in the units. This gave the sense that attempts were either being made to "catch out" the user or patronisingly drive the point home. When the answer came out the same, S was confused about whether she had answered correctly.
- Transferability
  - S had difficulty in comparing UK qualifications to those she holds from her previous country (Syria). It is very hard to compare qualifications from another country to the SQCF and other frameworks.

Content:

- Bubbl
  - S found the Bubbl tool easy to use and says it gave her good practice with a piece of software she would use again.
- Case Studies
  - The Case Studies felt relevant and the shared experiences covered were accessible to S.
  - Recapping on the names of each case study meant she had to scroll backwards and forwards to re-familiarise herself with the individuals.
- Goal Setting
  - S felt that the long term goals she set whilst working through the Reflection Toolkit were realistic.
- Scope
  - The questions posed in Activities 1.1 and 5.1, My Banner felt too broad in scope. In particular the question "What makes you happy?" and the questions regarding commenting on past experiences.
  - Looking at the Timeline tool there was a lot for S to pick from, leading her to question whether or not he was to cover everything.

- Activity 3.1
  - S pointed out that not all users would be looking to change career, but that it was a useful exercise to step through.
- Activity 3.2
  - S cited this as being highly relevant when she came to write a new CV.
  - What would have been useful here is help on how to phrase work experience outside of the UK when in the UK and comment on the difference between non-UK and UK CVs.
- My Banner
  - Reviewing the banner at the end felt awkward to S.
  - Very little had changed overall so it didn't reflect her personal learning experience through the Reflection Toolkit.

S confirmed that she would return to the Reflection Toolkit in the future – when taking new steps, prior to a change, and to revisit his short and long term goals. S mentioned that the process and not the content stood out to her as being the most important part of engaging with the resource.

## **7. Recommendations**

Drawing together the key issues raised by the evaluative reflections of a range of practitioners and one service user at Bridges, this report recommends the following developmental activity:

- Creation of a one-page introductory guidance sheet for users, using Plain English and including information on how to use and save activities using the specific software
- Creation of a facilitator prompt/crib sheet
- Creation of an evaluative questionnaire for clients who complete the Reflection Toolkit
- A review of the language and content of the Reflection Toolkit once further evaluative responses have been obtained