

## LEVEL B FULL - IS IT WORTH IT?

Article dated September 2009

Author(s): ROY CHILDS

In line with the British Psychological Society's responsibility for maintaining and improving standards of test use, the Level B Full qualification was launched in 1999. Of the 463 people who have this qualification, 400 achieved this accolade through the ancient custom of 'grandfathering'. This means 63 people have achieved this qualification using the LBF competency assessment process. This article is based on a survey of people who have sought and achieved their LBF and asked them the following questions:

1. Why they sought the LBF qualification;
2. What have they learnt;
3. How the qualification has helped;
4. Whether they would recommend to others.

Of the 63 approached there were 14 replies and a summary of the comments made are as follows.

**1. Why they sought the LBF qualification** The range of reasons given all involve wanting to know more, sometimes from a defensive and sometimes from a positive perspective. A summary of the reasons are:

- marketability and credibility (looks good on the CV or to clients);
- professionalism (part of continuing professional development, recognition that knowing a couple of instruments was not enough, wanting to be able to advise clients beyond their own specific instruments);
- stimulation (trained a long while ago and wanted to extend their ideas or learn about other instruments);
- security (having responsibility for test usage and wanting to make sure that they were on top of the game).

**2. What have they learnt** The range of comments here ranged from 'very little' to 'just what I needed'. Some said it was a really good refresher because many of the ideas in the original training had been lost with the passage of time. Some of the themes or reasons given involved:

- Greater breadth and depth – most commented on how they had examined more instruments than simply the ones on which they had been trained and that this was valuable because it helped them to re-evaluate their current usage and to consider alternatives;
- Reminders of the limitations – this involved the usefulness of re-evaluating the instruments they currently used because it is so easy to develop a habit, to go beyond the data or to over-generalise;
- Reminders of the complexity – that a good instrument is not just one with a few psychometric indices and that a more critical evaluation of reliability and validity was important.

**3. How has the qualification helped** A couple of comments were that the qualification had not helped them at all. However, the remainder made the following points:

- Quality – the belief that they now gave a better quality of service. This was either seen as better advice, better design of how tests become integrated or simply a better choice of instruments;
- Confidence – the individuals felt better in themselves because they were better able to explain and justify what they were doing;
- Differentiation – two individuals made a clear statement of how the qualification had set them apart from the field. One stated how he had been awarded a significant piece of work (when tendering against three other consultancies) on the basis that he had a level of psychometric expertise that the others did not have. He added that 'this paid for the course

several times over'.

**4. Whether they would recommend it to others** The comments here were largely concerned with the amount of work involved in getting the qualification – and some suggested this was more like a diploma than a 'certificate'. Specific points were as follows:

- Yes and especially for those with a broad psychometric remit – it is particularly pertinent for those who have responsibility for policy and practice, who are setting up assessment processes (especially if these could be under the spotlight), for those in a position to recommend alternative tests or approaches and for those who may be developing instruments themselves;
- Yes for those who want to broaden their horizons and develop their confidence – for some the key was to learn about different instruments and become confident that they really do know what they are talking about. It was also useful to get out from the umbrella of the publisher in order to take an independent view of the instruments;
- Yes for those with an academic bent – it is a conceptual process and this may not fit all styles. Psychologists have a particular advantage because the ideas are part of their own academic background, but many will not have covered the ideas in this depth and so it is still useful for them;
- Not for the faint hearted – one major reservation was that people wouldn't realise the amount of work involved before they embark on it. Perhaps a better evaluation of ROI (Return on Investment) since the benefits are there but so is the considerable effort.

The organisations who trained the people in this survey were: JCA(1), OPP(1), OPS (1), SRA (1), Sue Waters (1), Team Focus (8).\*

#### **Additional thoughts**

Given the small take-up of the Level B Full since it was launched it is interesting that the comments were largely positive. This is not to say that there were not significant reservations (especially by a few) about who would find it worthwhile, whether the syllabus was misconceived and whether the effort was worth it. One important issue to consider is the benefit there is in people re-examining the instruments they have trained to use with people other than the publisher. Some of the comments in terms of recognising some of the limitations of their own instruments better may be a feature of their increased maturity through usage but may also be a feature that publishers may see their own instruments through a slightly rosy set of spectacles. However, this may be precisely the reason that there has been little take-up – perhaps there is a lack of motivation from the publishers for users to become more critical and to consider alternatives. Perhaps this is precisely why Level B Full should be promoted more forcefully. Dare I suggest that Level B Intermediate be regarded as practitioners in training and that they can finally take their L-plates off having completed Level B Full?