

## Stuart Meese : a professional profile.

### Current Position

My current position, from July 2012, is as Head of the Frank Chapman Outdoor Education Centre (FCC) in the Wyre Forest, Bewdley. The centre is run and owned by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council's (SMBC) Learning Services, as part of Sandwell Residential Education Service (SRES) along with 3 other residential centres. The FCC provides a wide variety of activities set in 90 acres of SSSI forest including bushcraft, orienteering, climbing and paddlesport (based at the River Severn). With 72 residential beds, camp fields and five teaching staff and eight support staff.

My role of Head of Centre has three key aims:

- *To provide the lead, manage and develop the centre.*
- *Lead, deliver/contribute to courses at the centre*
- *Deputise for the SRES Manager*

(Appendix 4, SMBC Job Description HR65)

The defined role is required to set the aims and objective of the centre, define its ethos and lead the staff team within this. With overall responsibility for Health and Safety on the site and for activity, the role is also required to set the budget and priorities, market the products and improve and develop the standards of tuition.

### Context of the Role Within the Industry

According to its historical origins within the SMBC Education Department, the centre follows a similar structure to a school (primary) of Head, Deputy and Tutors and until recently, working conditions have also followed school term time working conditions (National College for Teaching and Leadership, 2012). The Head role carries many of the responsibilities of a head teacher without the statutory underpinning legislated in the Education Act of 2002 (National Legislative Archives, 2013)

In an outdoor education context the role sits equivalent to Lead Practitioner of the Institute of Outdoor Learnings (LPIOL). The criteria for this matches apart from the IOL's outward looking benchmarks (IOL LPIOL Benchmarks 040610, 2010). The Head of Centres role is more inward facing towards the organisation and limited in its regional effect. The SMBC Job Description does nod towards raising the external profile of SRES as a whole regionally and nationally but not explicitly to then influencing policy or activity. The Skills Active National Occupational Standards (2006-9) also requires a reach outside of the organisation to influence practice and policy at a level beyond the workplace, this is where the current role as defined by SMBC falls short.

Otherwise the role also maps well against the Skills Active National Occupational Standards (Skills Active 2006) for Senior Roles. These were derived from generic managerial standards published by the Management Standards Centre in 2008.

*These are intended for use across a wide range of industrial sectors, and the language used within them is suitably generic.*

Skills Active (2006)

The management skills for the role reach far wider than just outdoor education into generic issues such as premises, personnel, and even crosses into other relevant industries such as catering, hospitality and woodland management. Analysis of the the National Qualification Framework (NQF) against the SMBC Personal Specification HR66 for the role, shows that Qualification Credit Framework Level 6 matches the requirement, primarily for a Degree level education and marries against the similar assessment of LPIOL.

## Skills, knowledge and experience developed for my current role

### Key requirements of my current role...

The centre had suffered a period of stagnation from around 2008, this was followed by a prolonged loss of leadership, from 2010 onwards, where the centre was run remotely by the SRES manager with the Deputy Head having day to day operational control.

Towards the end of 2011, The SRES Service Manager identified from data obtained from the customer feedback and bookings system, that the customer base at FCC was rapidly dwindling due to three main issues. These factor were analysed as the main 'drivers for change' (Skills Active NOS A13.1, 2006)

- Distance and poor customer relations between FCC staff and visiting groups.
- The ethos and activities of the centre activity was moving towards eco/field study centre and away from adventurous activity.
- Lack of contact time with tutors & large group sizes resulting in lower quality delivery.

The business model and staffing terms were non-commercial and did not adjust for the changes in the economy since 2008. A lack of capital investment, falling revenues combined with existing budget cuts (2012) and predicted staged cuts of 25% (to 2015) made this driver critical.

The requirements for the role, set in agreement with the SRES manager was to address these issues. The table below shows the actions agreed categorised against the Skills Active National Occupational Standards for Outdoor Senior Roles.

Action	SA NOS
Provide radical change in ethos and direction to drive the centre forward.	<b>A13, A110, A111, 264, B218, A514</b>
Provide leadership, control and direction for the staff team	<b>A322, A321, A332, A337, B19</b>
Address issues around customer care and falling quality of delivery.	<b>B231 A311, A511, A514, B19,, B243, C314</b>

Budget to match falling revenue including staffing restructures and further cost savings in all areas. Retain and improve revenues.	<b>A27, A336, A28, A29, A215, A216, B246, B218</b>
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**\*KEY DESCRIPTORS IN BOLD**

Analysis of the table shows that these actions largely all fall under the broader SA management definitions rather than the industry specialised ones.

**What makes me effective at my job...**

My recruitment to the role was based on my experience of delivering of high risk activities under the Adventurous Activities Licensing Authority legislation, ability to restructure an outdoor service, a commitment to high quality outdoor education using adventurous activities. As a senior practitioner I still enjoy hugely being at the 'coal face' working with young people at all levels but realise the time I have for this is much reduced.

The keys areas I consider to be my strengths are (mapped to the standards for the Skills Active).

- My ability to see different way of doing things, random & alternate connections, and reshape services to effect change, this was evidenced in my project work for Essex CC and restructure of Powys County Councils Outdoor Service in 2010. (SA NOS A13, A111, A336 B218)
- An ability to take risks, manage risk against benefit. Provide the right environment for adventure (real or perceived) for adventurous outdoor learning, this was accredited as part of the Accredited Practitioner for the Institute of Outdoor Learning (SA NOS C264)
- I am a confident decision maker and with a clear sense of direction of what I want to achieve, able to enthuse and encourage others in my team to adopt the same direction and work with me to gain these goals. I strive to be honest, fair and transparent in my decision making. (SA NOS A111, A110, A322, A332)
- Ability to deliver customer service – excellent communication skills, a range of tools and techniques for listening to the customer, accredited by gaining English Tourist Board 3 Star status for customer service. (SA NOS A231)

Areas of weakness that exist are in the areas of financial and budgetary control and conflicts and failings within my leadership. My analysis of these areas comes from my own reflection and work with peers and external bodies such as OFSTEAD to assess my practice, recent appraisals/supervision sessions with line managers and customer response. It does however point to a glaring omission - it does not include any opinion from my team who are managed by me and are directly affected by my competencies in these areas. This shows a marked areas of blindness, if not weakness that should be addressed.

My current post requirements matches well with the accepted standards and the current modernisation many centres are undergoing but explicitly fall shorts in the outward looking aspects that shape and change our industry and other practitioners practice. In a time of great change this cannot be overlooked along with addressing the weaknesses that will unpick a successful organisational change.

## **Values and philosophy that are important to me...and how I chose them.**

### **Philosophy**

I have chosen my values, not from a given morality or *a priori* 'Good' but from my experiences, culture and the exposure to them or their abuses. As such they have moved over time and with my association and development. A personal philosophy is greatly derived from a deep affinity with existential writers. Sartre's (1943) philosophy allows the individual to make continuous and conscious free choice. These can be defined by the roles we cast ourselves into but more authentic is that we have the choice to not accept these external norms. The freedom, and terror, from choice without reference to a morality or higher truth that this presents I find liberating, but with it comes the consequences, the responsibility of a choice for all, as a choice for all mankind.

It is difficult to operate in the world without adopting roles and norms, so a personal dichotomy always arises - you choose the 'bad faith' (Sartre 1943) with full knowledge of the freedom you could have and lack of authenticity. These values then can often bring me into conflict with my role as much as they assist my execution of it. Defining the separation between myself and the role I must adopt as Head of Centre and outdoor educator is a difficult path likened to the tension between outdoor education's 'philosophy' and the requirement to package a commercial product.

### **Values**

My background and academic training at undergraduate level in Philosophy (Appendix 1) demonstrates my valuing of *debate and discourse*. I like to develop ideas through these methods often in a spirited and robust way with those who will engage. It combines the act of critical thinking with moderation of arguments and acts as a testing bed for ideas and conjunctions. The downside of this is that often incomplete ideas are espoused in order to develop or reject.

As much as I value debate, I value the ability to be cordial. The ability to debate passionately, disagree and remain cooperative and amenable is a skill and something to be valued. This value I cannot find any other origin other than my own personal comportment and a strongly held belief and experience that being a bit nicer to each other helps. I have little time for those who profess to speak their mind as a cover for their rudeness.

I value *fairness*, rather than equality. To be fair involves a differentiation and distinction of a persons individual needs. Equality gives each the same so they are often confused. However fairness is a moveable feast, far harder defined by subjective ethics, upbringing, and cultural

norms whilst equality can be measured, fixed and defined and a much less precise tool. This is a controversial subject especially in the field of recruitment where positive action can be seen as discrimination (Balden 2011).

My idea of what is fair evolved during my work in European youth participation projects. (Appendix 3) A founding principal of Youth Participation work gives the child the right to a voice. To enable that voice will need more than would be given to an adult to do the same. The recognition of individuality, and inherent imbalances means that to be given the same chances and to be able to have the hope to achieve the similar outcomes the treatment of individuals must meet their needs. This may mean more time effort, money and thought needs to go to some and this can be see as unequal - to my mind, as it is with (Balden 2011), it is the act of levelling the scales. In action as a practitioner this would be the basis for my differentiation in sessions - helping some children more so that the outcomes were roughly similar a stance I have often had to defend to those see disaffected youths getting 'all the fun', as a manager this can mean that my actions are seen as unequal but in enabling my staff in areas such as training, where to raise all to the standard needed, time effort and money is allocated differently.

### **Journey to Outdoor Educator.**

My intention in entering the outdoor profession was never to work in the developmental outdoor education sector instead to become a sailing instructor with the aim of travel and personal adventure. My career development path at this time followed the Royal Yachting Association's qualification structure in yachting, powerboating, sailing and windsurfing. (RYA 2013) Whilst undertaking Senior Instructor training, soft skills in senior role were discussed and their relevance to me as a new RYA principal were revealing. I also had my first experience of basic theories of learning (NLP and VARK) whilst attending a L3 Windsurf Instructors course with a pioneer of NLP in windsurf coaching, Jeff Medd.

Whilst working for Essex County Council, the summers allowed me the opportunity to practice as a manager, instructor and high level coach, winters brought a change to more traditional long term OE developmental programmes which I devised and delivered with special needs, disaffected young people, challenging emotional and behavioural groups. Without any formal guidance or training I applied my coaching skills and techniques into this field as formative OE developmental practice.

*Effective coaching involves a cyclical process of planning a session, conducting or delivering the session and then evaluating and reflecting on the session and its delivery.*

(Lomax in Berry & Hodgson 2011:85)

Whilst the RYA system superficially touches on reviewing skills, this aspect of OE began with my discovery of reviewing in Roger Greenaway's seminal book Playback (1993) and became a starting point for a more rounded, and reflective practitioner. Whilst an instructor or

coach I had never considered myself a 'leader' or a 'facilitator' but Lomax (2011) makes the point that coaches and outdoor educators have complementary skills.

*Coaching now overlaps with other disciplines, such as teaching, facilitation and counselling.*

(Lomax in Berry & Hodgson 2011:85)

Thomas (2010) Makes clear the roles of facilitator, teacher, leader and instructor are rarely clearly separate and it is the understanding and choice of roles that is important. At this time I had little clarity on the role of 'facilitator' but strengths in being a 'facilitative trainer' within Schwarz's (in Thomas 2010) analysis of the five roles, and as such chose my strength. Facilitative trainers have knowledge and information to impart to the learner whereas the facilitator enables the learners process. Thomas (2010) places the emphasis on content as the defining feature that changes between these roles and this fits with my view of myself as a hard skills coach moving towards a developmental outdoor educator. Thomas (2010) also recognises the development in my practice of becoming comfortable relinquishing control over this content, allowing variability of the experience and the learner to influence the outcome.

The journey was not planned nor intentional but a product of both circumstance, inherent leanings, role and development. The continuing desire to work in the outdoors in a useful capacity pushed me into roles where I needed to develop the facilitation skills to be effective. The two underlying paths of instructor and outdoor developmental educator create an unresolved tension in my career, but offer a variety of viewpoints and tools.

### **Formal Courses and Trainings**

Whilst working with developmental groups and youth workers trained in these skills an opportunity arose to address the deficiencies in my theoretical understanding of facilitation and to participate in a Developing the Trainers course run by the Brathay Trust in 2001 (Appendix 2) The course covered a multitude of developmental tasks, tools and skills along with their theoretical underpinnings over an intensive 5 day period. This course became the pivotal juncture where I embarked a career direction from instructor/coach to more facilitator/leader role. The course delivery was done in the mixture of styles from practical application to intense theory sessions and was built around the Kolb (1984) reflective cycle in order to embed the trainer in the practice.

An exploration of Berne's theory of (1950) Transactional Analysis during this course plus my subsequent work with my line manager and Youth Participation mentor John Maynard, was particularly useful to understand empowerment and my communication methods. As a tool I have found it particularly salient in my work with young people.

Later in my career as a youth worker, youth participation worker and youth work team leader (appendix 3) I would spend much more time being formally trained and practicing these facilitation skills in an informal experiential education setting such as youth parliaments, open centre work and complementary education, but not always OE.

## Learning themes in my career

My journey as an outdoor educator has been shaped by three main learning themes: Risk, Change and Leadership.

### **RISK:**

My fascination with risk is intrinsic to who I am. I find my day to day work and personal littered with decisions about managing risk. My formal training in managing Health and Safety came under the Institute of Safety and Health (IOSH) accreditation scheme (appendix 2) This taught me that OE does not fit into the HSE's 5 Steps model. This model seeks to reduce the risk to zero or a practically zero as is affordable or achievable. This works well for industrial tasks where risk is an unwanted byproduct of the activity. The model of risk assessment that better fit OE is a Risk Benefit Analysis proposed by Gill (2010: 16) and adopted by the Outdoor Education Advisory Panels National Guidance Document (2013) as it seeks to maintain acceptable risk which has intrinsic worth to the activity.

I actively seek opportunities of real risk. This could be offshore yachting to free climbing the centre wall whilst no one is around. This is often the adventure categorised by Mortlock's (1994) Stage Three : Frontier Adventure or just beyond. For him this is 'peak adventure' which should be experienced by all as a learning/development tool.

Risk, however, as a central feature to outdoor (Adventure) education is not without its own debate within the field. Brown M (2009:61) acknowledges that risk is a 'valued and as a distinguishing feature', but one that has come predominate the field. He suggests it should be kept as just one tool within the armory of the practitioner and one that has had its time, and place, but has little theoretical backup. (Brown, M 2009:69).

Brown, M (2009:65) and Dickson (2000) both offer complimentary views that claim that there are few real risks in OAE. They claim in most cases, activities undertaken in professional OAE to create Frontier/Peak Adventure (Mortlock 1993) are using apparent risks, engineered by the practitioner to provide the necessary experience without any real danger. However, the ability of practitioners to judge levels of perceived risk for each individual within a group programme, that would satisfy their collective journey into Mortlock's Frontier Adventure, is a hugely difficult task. I disagree with their stance, a prime competency of the facilitator is to judge the level of risk that each person needs. It can be easily misjudged but on the whole during my career have seen it well met.

*However, no matter how difficult provision of stage III might be, it is essential to try and provide it for each beginner as an introduction*

Mortlock (1993:25)

Whilst Brown M (2009) may have validity in his assessment of risk as one tool in the box, and I agree that learning in OE can exist without risk, but is less visceral and powerful. I do feel that the emotional and social risks of OE are not given the prominence they deserve, with the main focus on the physical. The social interactions and the risks participant take in these during usually intense periods of learning is perhaps a missed opportunity for OE and OAE.

During my career there have been many experiences that have taught me about myself through risk not least as skipper of my first offshore passage with a short handed crew of 2 in a dismasted 36 foot sailing boat. An unexpected storm at night whilst crossing the main shipping channel servicing the Adriatic. Waves were 4m+ high and combined with high winds, lightning and driving rain and a difficult and potentially very dangerous port entrance. This was far outside my comfort zone and crossed into Mortlock's (1994) Stage 4: Misadventure, not just for myself but for the crew. Being in command, fearful and inexperienced in a situation enables me to look back and relate to participants how they must be when they too are at the outer limits asked for decisions or action. My learning from this event was powerful and guides my feelings about decision making and the responsibility of command. It helps me set the right amount of perceived risk for my students and recognise their responses. It often helps me make the right choice to push on to a summit or enjoy a lower route.

H.E.Brown's (2000) paper offers possibility that outdoor educators are engaged with participants through a process modeled on the Tannenbaum and Schmidt's (1957) Continuum of Control and Power. However this too reinforces M.Brown's (2009:63) assertion that a transitory adventure experience has little value and is only a short term modification of behavior, rather than a real change in character. Brown's (2000:37) model asks that we accept a suitable timescale to improve competency, alongside increasing risk for the participant to progress through these levels. This also has the beneficial side effect of training participants, especially young people in appropriate risk management. This is something children play commentator Gill (2007, 10, 11) has long called for and I have seen evidence of much need in my work.

#### **CHANGE:**

As someone who has regularly been given roles to drive change, deliver OE projects, or develop new programmes, my current role provides me with another opportunity to affect an organisational change during a period where the debate about the purpose and value of OE has never more acute.

OE has often been held up as a tool to provide commercial organisations with the learning to effect change (McEvoy 1997) but since 2008 we have seen a massive transformation of our own sector as centres close, restructure and move towards charitable and commercial realms.

Pre 2008 and the economic downturn, Barnes (in Barnes & Sharp 2004:13) saw a modern move away from the Hahnian and religious based underpinnings for outdoor education, based in civic service, character building and duty, towards Rousseau and Dewey's exploration of effective methods of learning through engagement with nature for experimentation and reflection.

The ideal presents a simple ideological rationale for an outdoor centre based loosely upon the bedrock of Hahn's 1941 Outward Bound Centre.

Barnes (2006:No page) sets this out as



*An educational element which stimulates personal and social development;  
An experience which will usually include themes of 'outdoor,' 'adventure' and  
'education;' Learning as an experiential process which utilizes direct experience; An  
increased self and social awareness plus increased awareness of community and  
environment.*

The other side sits on the shifting sands of commercialism where meeting the needs of the customer based on a financial transaction is paramount . Barnes (2006:No page) attributes this to the growth and accessibility of the OE sector to wider society. This is evident in the shift to taster activities, adrenaline filled sessions and short courses. Williams (in Barnes & Sharp 2004:166) make the case if we are to charge for the provision then we must accept the contract that brings.

The modern debate focuses on the battle between outdoor education's use of nature as a consumer product, to be utilised in the pursuit of our development, activities and free-time, or desired outcomes and the organic (re)connection and full engagement with nature in the raw - characterised by Louv (2010). Increasingly the question is not about the philosophy of outdoor education but more of which philosophy to adopt to suit the consumer. As Barnes (2004) points out, the hardheaded business practice of keeping people in jobs and centres open requires centre heads to seek their markets and respond with a product not a philosophy. There is no difference between meeting the individual needs in the group, as there is in meeting the need of differing groups. If we wish to be taken seriously by education and government, be funded and hopefully seek sanctuary in statutory provision we must accept the criteria and engage with the funders to find the objectives we share.

Williams (in Barnes & Sharp 2004:168) sets out the case for a professional service, one that recognises the tensions between values, demand and stakeholders/funders interests. My formative years in the industry started from the late '90s and missed the period of great ideology. Grounded in view of the outdoor educator as a professional I do not see Barnes' (2006) view of removal of responsibility from the client but rather Heather Brown's (2000) model of a '*passenger to practitioner*'. I do recognise that the opportunities and time frames for me to develop this continuum are vastly limiting due to commercial and other pressures.

Within my centre the core issue during this period has been a lack of reflective practice as an organisation and from the service that has allowed the drivers for change to become so critically massed. To address this I have had to call upon the experience of restructuring a previous outdoor education service for Powys County Council. With Powys I took the post mid restructure, after the decision was made to close one of the two centres. The need was financial as the centre was balancing the books but the lack of capital investment over 20 years in the building fabric meant the county could not afford to do the necessary works.

The restructure was quick and haphazard, as remaining centre staffing also needed to be reduced to meet expenditure and the service reshaped. However it was identified that the

closing centre had the ethos values and products that the customers wanted, not the remaining one.

Looking at the restructure through the lens of Nadler and Tushmans congruence model (1997 in Cameron 2009) there was a failing on several accounts. The department of the council responsible had no clear picture of the need or benefits of keeping an outdoor centre beyond its finances. There was no clear vision of its purpose nor the desired result of the restructure and whilst the short term local vision (mine) was to transplant the values and practices of the old centre there was little work or support for changing the team or their skills to meet this, and resulted in only piecemeal reorganisation of the methods of working to realign. As such there were large issues of control and power as the remaining centre lurched off balance and then returned to where it had began without effecting any real change.

### **LEADERSHIP:**

Whilst an outwardly confident leader my concern to be a better and more effective leader provides the right amount of self doubt and motivation to drive improvement. I do not readily adopt a delegatory leadership style but seek to listen to the arguments and discourse and then progress to a decision either autocratically or democratically. I am never afraid to reverse a decision if it is then wrong but my desire/rush to make a timely one can be the undoing of many.

When considering my managerial style against Adiar's (1998) model of action centred leadership Ogilvie (2005:72) I recognise that I prioritise the three elements in order: task, the team, the individual and I defend this with the statement that in business the task *is* the priority. The reverse is true in my practice as an outdoor educator where I see the individual engaging with the process as paramount concern and the task as disposable to obtain the right process. This first stance can often be counterproductive with staff who feel that they are secondary to the outcomes and in my outdoor practice this can detriment those participants who focus is the goal and not the group. This is not to say, as Ogilvie (2005) does, that I am single minded in this but have a strong leaning in the direction that needs to be checked occasionally!

Tennenbaum & Schmidts (Ogillive 2005:77) continuum model better fits the method of leadership I hope to employ. However this is best seen in conjunction with Arnstein's(1969) Ladder of Participation.

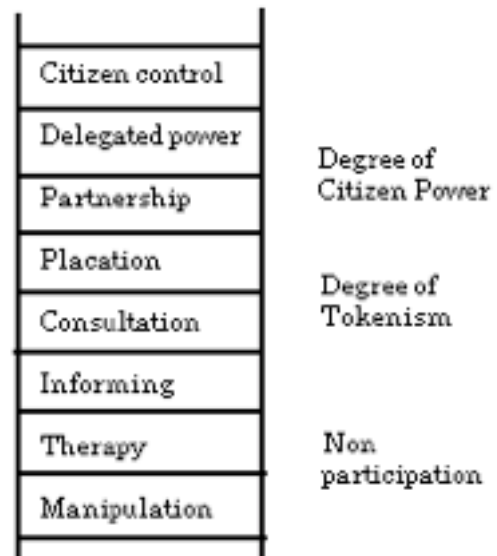
As the leader shares power and reduces control as too does participation increases. At the top level the leader becomes part of the citizenship and the body decided together. At the other end the team is manipulated to do as the leader says.

The ladder of participation is critical to understand the Continuum of Control and Powers as it defines the steps necessary to empower the group which is what I believe Brown H (2000) made clear in her adaptation of it. It is not possible to jump directly to Citizen Control/ Delegation without first going through the preceding steps starting from the point the group

is comfortable. Each step requires an increase in competency, reflection and normalisation before the next rung is reached. It can always go backwards too if a difficult section is encountered that creates discomfort in the team taking more control.

Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Participation (right)

My direct experience of this is when leading a work team or group of young people who have had little or no say in their work and are then subjected to a Joint or Delegated form of leadership. They are unable to respond or contribute effectively until they have been given the empowerment and skills to be able to make the steps up. This



was particularly prevalent in youth participation work and when taking over a managerial role where the previous incumbent had been very autocratic.

I have found reaching the top rung or Delegated part of the models difficult to achieve in my career either through my own inability to let go of the power and accept the consequences of such or because I haven't been able to empower or up-skill the team enough to make them able to fully participate. My dealings with Transactional Analysis however has been helpful in my journey towards this goal as it enable me to see the communication that helps and hinders the progression.

### **My preferred way(s) of learning**

As a strong believer in experiential education I also really enjoy the unfashionable didactic learning as a personal way of learning. Having tried several of the 'tests' that determine a learning style over many of the years from Multiple Intelligence, VARK, Kolb, SDI, Myers-Briggs, I have found that my preferences, leanings etc shifts depending on the delivery, situation, stage in my life and type of learning involved. A simplistic VARK analysis confirms this with a multimodal diagnosis (appendix 5) but as expected I have stronger kinaesthetic but also written tendencies.

Under Kolbs (1985) Learning Style Inventory there is, currently, an almost perfect balance between my Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation and Abstract Conceptualisation but a determined spike on Active Experimentation. Something one would expect of a person drawn to my profession (Appendix 5). This was assessed using the aggregate of several the Kolb Learning Styles Inventory tests online and the Kolb Inventory self assessment test provided for this course.

The problem though comes in the descriptive of my peak characteristic of AE.

*A high score on Active Experimentation indicates an active, "doing" orientation to learning that relies heavily on experimentation. High AE individuals learn best when they can engage in such things as projects, homework, or small group discussions. They dislike passive learning situation such as lectures. These individuals tend to be extroverts.*

Kolb (1985)

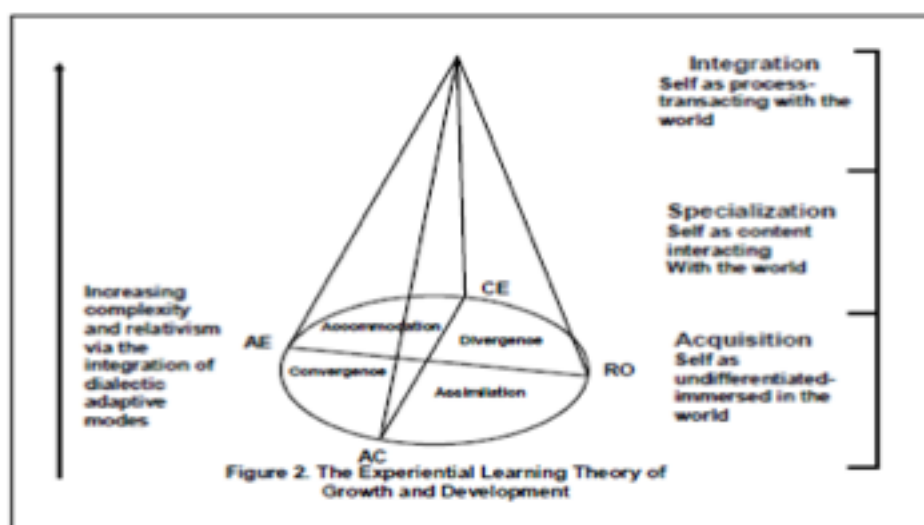
Whilst there are some descriptors that seem accurate there is a much that doesn't feel like me such as homework, dislike of lectures and extrovert. Honey and Mumford's (1982) Pragmatist adaptation of Kolb AE category feels more accurate but if their intention is to highlight under utilised aspects a learner has it is more likely to reinforce a preference.

Kolb (1984, 1985) does, for me, fail the McWilliam fit and feel criteria (in Barnes and Sharp 2004). Criticism of Kolb's model also comes from other experiential educators too. Chris Loynes (Sept 2000 cited in Greenaway's Critiques of Kolb) doubts it's application in a real world educational setting as a practical demonstrable teaching tool. Dickson (2000 cited in Greenaway's Critiques of Kolb) notes:

*the seemingly simplistic linear nature of the model (many people I know do not learn in this nice linear way, they are much more random, may "regress" through Kolb's stages, work in different orders)the circular model may also give the impression that the stages are equal in time, emphasis etc..*

Kolb & Kolb's (2008) later reworking of the Kolb (1984) model goes some way to addressing some of Dickson's (2000) issues in that the learner may enter at any point in the cycle and may transit the process and perception scales - most likely at the points they are most comfortable. The stages may not be equal as the point of the cone shifts. The hope is that as the learner engages equally with each sector the cone sits over the centre but where there is a preference pulling the peak, the effort to enact the opposing segments increases. As skill level increases the learner transits and rises up the cone faster and more seamlessly.

Figure 2



Kolb & Kolb's 2008 Learning Cycle

I still find the cyclical linearity of the model difficult. It does not address the random moment of unconscious (or day dream conscious) connection in learning, and requires my focus to be in the learning cycle for progression. A more convincing theory of learning is required. Cognitive scientist Guy Claxton's (2002) *Building Learning Power*. Claxton (2002) posits a set of 17 learning capacities in four groups of Resilience, Resourcefulness, Reciprocity & Reflection. These capacities, not skills, are what we use to learn. There is no order or linearity to the dispositions rather they are interwoven. Dispositions shift, wax and wane with situations and are not necessarily consistent in their application. Enjoyment, rather than frustration, is found in the uncertainty of success. Knowledge (content) sits out there as remote islands and the engagement brings connections to those islands.

This theory, feels a better fit and addresses Dickson's(2000) and my disquiet with Kolb and the random connections we make and see in others learning, and fits well with both formal and informal educational purposes especially experiential learning, where our love of problem solving and the vagaries of our natural world challenge us.

### **Reflection**

My journey as a reflective practitioner started within the Youth Service as I became responsible for staffing and the reflective process was combined with supervision. This process was broken into a 3 way split been managerial, peer feedback and self directed analysis.

Youth work utilised reflective practice internally far more than OE did at the time. The project work I undertook in youth participation was regularly punctuated by opportunities to reflect on what we had done and gather views from stakeholders and reflect on this. The reflection took many forms from objective data correlated and analysed to meetings with stakeholder and young people to discuss ways forward. This almost always happened after the fact - in wash-ups and analysis.

At the heart has always been my self guided reflection and I have often used a modified cutdown version of the Gibbs (1988) structure - '*Facts, Finding and Future*' both on myself as a quick review tool and with facilitating groups. The act of very structured reflection can be stifling to the immediacy of the session but can be useful in larger projects and more complex scenarios. Open reflection better suits the more immediate and less complex responses to a session.

Gibbs's relies, as does Kolb (1984), on the concrete event having been completed, but I have found that the reflective process is far more intrinsic to the activity and happens within the process. A simple analogy is the instructors sensing a session not going 'right' and changing it to enable the 'blockage' to be bypassed or disappear. Schön (1983) called this 'reflection in action' which to my mind is the basis for a good practitioner and a point that Ogilvie (2005:124) also makes.

Self guided reflection has the advantage that the subject is always open to the criticism, external opinion from others can be guardedly received or rejected. The most productive

times and most reflective aspects of my career have always been when there is a coach or mentor figure who has been able to guide me to produce, focus and clarify outputs from my reflection as well as being able to ask the difficult questions that I have usually wanted to avoid. An example was during my setting up of several complementary outdoor education projects whilst working in an environment that provided no support. I took on the APIOL accreditation and was able to access a mentor who not just guided me through the process but was able to coach deeper reflection on the work I was doing. A quick exercise with the Johari Windows model developed by Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham in 1955, explains why the external coaching view opens up the blind spot to a participant and prods at the facade allowing growing self awareness.

## **My ambitions and hopes**

### **What I need to develop & how I want to develop it.**

From my analysis of the need of my role and my own strength and weaknesses it would seem that there are several areas of development needed.

To address the issues I discovered in the Skills Active mapping to my current role, I hope to develop my regional activity with active participation in the IOL and also the Association of Heads of Outdoor Educations Centres. As an active member of both within Wales, I have not yet had the opportunity to develop opportunities to develop other OE practitioners in the Midlands. The enrolment onto the Leading Practitioner IOL accreditation has already given me access to courses run by Heather Brown on strategic leadership and making a change outside of your workplace.

### **Risk and adventure as OE**

Risk is not always seen as a positive within OE (Brown, M 2009 : 65, Dickson 2000) but most see it as a central element (Ogilvie 2005, Mortlock 1994). My own view is that it is a highly effective tool in our practice. I would like to try to develop further my understanding of risk in our field and its role and outcomes.

The benefits of risk and alternative choices has had some but not comprehensive debate. Risk is often seen just in the physical sphere and this too narrowly defines a concept that has so much additional application in the social and emotional aspects of our work.

My previous research proposal, to examine the effect of risk on the target groups I work with, enlightened several things I have yet to fully explore.

- The levels of risk aversion in schools (and greater society).
- The ability to measure benefits from risk taking both social and physical.
- The alternatives to risk - can they give the same effects?

This should be the first work based project and follow on from the research proposal in 2013. Also the learning from this will feed directly into the work at FCC as we develop a

clear sense of how we are using and increasing our use of adventurous activities. We can measure this directly from our customers over the next two years.

### **Change Management**

Having been through and led an organisational change and now presented with the opportunity to deliver another, the development of my understanding of change management can be guided by reflection on the previous experiences, drawing from it the key elements that were effective and those that weren't. Without a strong theoretical underpinning in this area there was a huge amount of uncertainty I would like to address and explore. These would include

- Models of change. Especially those from organisation looking to modernise and grounded in values rather than commercial practice - their similar tensions and negotiations.
- Examples from other similar industries. What were the key factors for success? How did they measure the improvements other than in commercial terms?
- Experiences from OE sector on change. Those having made it into the commercial sector. Did their organisational values change or did these remain fixed and just their practices shift?

The development of FCC will be integral to this endeavour as I put into practice the learning I gain. To ensure there is some focused work done on this learning element I would hope to reflect on the previous experience with a coach guiding me. Mapping this experience to a theoretical stances in change management would allow me understand the wider perspectives and give clarity on driving a clear and effective plan which would be implemented in the workplace. This plan would be measurable by several means - customer feedback, bookings, outcomes for young people and the results would be able to feed back into the subsequent changes to that plan - I hope to be able to keep the centre dynamically and responsively in a state of smaller change throughout my tenure.

### **Leadership**

Conjoined to the preceding topic of Change, one of the defining elements in its effectiveness will be my ability to become a better leader. No reflective leader is ever happy. I have already identified that I have default leaderships styles for situations and whilst this is healthy in some respects, as it gives others certainty and consistency, it also could be an inappropriate style for others.

With only incomplete knowledge of my Johari blind spot it would be useful for me to poll colleagues and friends for an honest view to open this room for me and reflect upon it. Critical and more effective reflection based on a greater self knowledge can address the factor that stop me making the transition to a leader able to take the step to allow greater autonomy to my team.

My (self) identified weakness in this area is around the loss of control and the ability to focus on the individual and team within a workforce situation. Development is need here to practice the behaviours that allow me more freedom to move to a more balanced leadership where group and individual have currency. Development and practice of the behaviours of emotional intelligence regards my social awareness and relationship management is needed. The other specific target I need to set myself is to up skill my team and empower them to accept the participation my lowering of control entails, without this step I any effort I make to moving to the top of the Tennenbaum & Schmidt continuum of power will be wasted.

### Final Thoughts

As an exercise to elucidate the 'real' me (Boyatzis 2006) this paper has enabled deeper understand of the underpinning for my actions in my values and philosophy, it has enabled a clearer view of my strengths in the role, my preferences for learning and highlighted several themes (value of adventure & risk, change management and appropriate leadership) that I feel I have both need to develop to be more effective in this role - weakness in these areas mean that I still need to work towards a more complete understanding of my real self underpinning the actions I make. The most serious of which is in the development of the trusting and supporting coach/mentoring relationship within the workplace that have helped me to develop in the past.

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## **Appendix 1 Education**

June 2006. International House, Budapest.  
University of Cambridge First Certificate in English Language Teaching. (Grade A)

July 1995. Cowes Leisure Management College, Isle of Wight.  
Professional Instructor Training & Work Experience. (Merit)

July 1994. University of Essex, Colchester.  
BA (Hons) Philosophy, Class 2:1

June 1989. Wellington College of Arts and Technology, Telford, Shropshire. (part-time)  
BTEC National Diploma in Computer Studies. (Merit)

## Appendix 2 Professional Qualifications & Training

### Vocational

HSE / REC First Aid at Work	Stress Management for Managers	Personal Safety Award
English Tourist Board Welcome Manager	NCF Coaching Children	Asbestos & Compliance Management
Lantra Tractor Driving Training	Educational Visits Leader & Coordinator (HASPEV)	Fire Safety Awareness L1-4
Manual Handling Certificate	Basic Food Hygiene L2	Equality & Diversity Training
IOSH Managing Health & Safety	LAYSER Citizenship and Young People	Child Protection Level 2
ECC Youth Participation Training	Data Protection Training	Safer Recruitment
ASDAN Short Course Moderator	Brathay Train the Trainers	IOL Strategic Leadership Course

### Outdoor Specific Qualifications

RYA Senior Dinghy Instructor	Team 15 Trainer	VHF/GMDSS Operators License
RYA Windsurf Trainer Level 1	RYA Safety Boat	NNAS Course Director
RYA Windsurf Club Race Coach (White)	BCU Kayak/Canoe Level 1 Coach	GNAS Archery Leader
RYA Powerboat Instructor	MLTB SPA Climbing Instructor	RYA Keelboat Instructor
RYA Dayskipper	MLTB WGL	RYA Senior Windsurf Instructor
Outdoor Learning Cards Course Director	RYA Regional Race Officer	Forest School Leader (trained) L3
DofE Assessor (Gold)	NICAS Course Director	APIOL Mentor/RPIOL Internal Facilitator

Other non certificated CPD

Environmental Education Workshops, Stubbers Adventure Centre  
Trueways Extended Bushcraft Skills, Cotswolds.

## **Appendix 3 Previous Career History**

June 2010 – July 2012

Powys County Council, Leisure Services, Llandrindod Wells, Powys.

Manager, Staylitttle Outdoor Education Centre

Manager of the councils outdoor education provision with a wide variety of activities including both land and water based. Responsible for a 50 bed residential centre with a staff of 25 including domestic, drivers and grounds. Development and delivery teacher training, Powys County Council employee development courses and corporate training.

May 2008 – June 2010

Essex County Council, Schools Children and Families, Chelmsford, Essex, UK.

*Behaviour and Attendance Support Worker.*

Design, implementation and delivery of outdoor educational programmes across 12 secondary schools to assist targeted students at risk of disengaging from formal education. Managing a team of 2 part time trainee/youth work staff. Courses designed to boost team skills, confidence and esteem and provide students with opportunities for learning outside the classroom. Providing accreditations in OCN, ASDAN, AQA.

*Level 2 Team Leader – Complementary Education.*

Design, implementation and delivery of educational programmes to assist targeted students at risk of disengaging from formal education. Managing a team of 2 part time youth work staff. Partnership working with community project leaders, Police, PCT & Drugs and Alcohol advisory service. Courses designed to build team and social skills, boost confidence and esteem and provide students with opportunities for learning outside the classroom.

December 2006 – May 2008

School for Hospitality, Tourism and Catering, Ljubljana / School for Computing and Electro-Technical, Ljubljana / High School, Ravne na Koroskem, Slovenia.

English Language Teacher. Ministry of Education

English language and project teacher for both high school and vocational colleges.

September 2005 – July 2006

Business College / School for Economics, Slovenj Gradec, Slovenia.

British Council - English Language Assistant.

Language assistant working in Slovenian Business and Technical college & Economics vocational college.

March 2005 – September 2005

Neilson Active Holidays, Thomas Cook Group, Brighton, Sussex, UK.

Flotilla Skipper. Greece-Lefkada, Peloponnese/Croatia-Dalmatia Coast.

Leading up to 9 guest yachts. Ionia, Greece and Dalmatia, Croatia with a maximum of 50 guests.

February 2000 – March 2005

Essex County Council, Youth Service, Chelmsford, Essex, UK.

*Level 3 Youth Worker - Young Essex Assembly. From August 2003*

Responsible for the project management and implementation of the Young Essex Assembly

*Level 3 Youth Worker - Educational Visits (secondment)*. From June 2003

Responsible for setting up an inspection system monitoring all education visits.

*Level 3 Youth Worker - Ardleigh Outdoor Education & Brightlingsea Marine Activities Centre*

Responsibility for all management aspects of two outdoor centres. Line manager for a staff of 15. Teaching SNVQ units in Outdoor Education at a local 6th Form college.

March 1999 – February 2000

South West Water, Exeter, UK.

Centre Manager - Siblyback Watersports Centre, Bodmin Moor, Cornwall.

Responsible for the all aspects of the centres operation. Line manager for a staff of 8.

Jan 1997 – March 1999

Essex Boys Clubs

Senior Instructor Watersports – Stubbers Adventure Centre, Upminster, Essex.

Responsible for the all aspects of the lakes operation.

Jan 1997 – March 1999

**Appendix 4**

**Current Role Job Description and Personal Specification**

**This document is available in large print, Braille or audio tape on request.**

# Job Description

(10/11)



<b>Job Title</b> Head of Residential Education Centre		<b>Thematic Area</b> People	
<b>Post No.</b> Field5	<b>Grade</b> SRES Tutorial 15 - 17	<b>Service</b> Residential Education Service	<b>Location</b> Frank Chapman Centre
<b>Responsible to</b> Residential Education Service Manager	<b>Contacts</b> Tutorial and non-tutorial staff, pupils, parents, staff in other departments, other agencies, suppliers, members of the public.	<b>Persons responsible for:</b> <i>(May be presented in the form of an organisation chart)</i> <b>Attach separate sheet</b> All staff at the Frank Chapman Centre	
<b>Working hours</b> SRES Tutorial Conditions		Special conditions: Overnight sleep-in/on-call in rotation with other staff; weekend working in accordance with SRES Terms and Conditions. <b>Approver:</b> i-procurement Order and Approve	
		<b>Conditions of Service</b> SRES Tutorial Terms and Conditions	

**This job description is a guide to the work you will initially be required to undertake. It may be reviewed from time to time to meet changing circumstances.**

<b>Job Summary</b>
To lead, manage and develop the Centre as part of Sandwell Residential Education Service, and to play a key management role in that Service. To take an appropriate role in delivering/contributing directly to courses operating at the Centre. To deputise for the SRES Manager as required.

<b>Your current duties and responsibilities are:-</b>
To formulate the aims, objectives and ethos of the Centre, in keeping with those of SRES.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Implement the policies through which the above shall be achieved
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Manage staff and resources to that end
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Monitor progress towards achievement of the above
Have responsibility for leading and managing all staff at the Centre, including implementation of performance management and professional development.
Ensure the provision of continued high quality courses at the Centre.
Manage the recruitment and selection of staff.
Have overall responsibility for Health and Safety issues for all areas of Centre operations ensuring compliance with legislation and Authority standards.

Write, lead, implement and monitor an annual Centre development plan, in line with SRES plan.

Have overall responsibility for the management of Centre site, buildings, facilities and plant.

Manage the Centre's financial operations within the SRES budget, including contributing to SRES financial management.

Undertake duties relating to income generation, including marketing and accessing funding streams.

Develop further links with current and potential partners, including all Sandwell schools.

Produce and present reports and statistical information as required.

Ensure a positive contribution to the community in the Centre locality.

Develop environmentally friendly management of the Centre.

Be a key member of the SRES management team, with responsibilities for specific aspects of SRES-wide operations and development.

Contribute to the SRES Development Plan.

Deputise for the SRES Manager as necessary.

Assist with Head of Centre duties at any other SRES Centre, on a temporary/short-term basis.

Represent SRES on professional bodies/in professional arenas as appropriate.

Play a key role in raising the profile of SRES locally, regionally and nationally.

Work as leader and member of the Centre team, in line with centre philosophy and aims.

Provide tuition, instruct and assist with courses as appropriate.

Be responsible for group safety and welfare whilst in your care.

Manage the development, planning, preparation, co-ordination, delivery, recording and monitoring of courses as appropriate.

Ensure the development of educational initiatives at the Centre.

Undertake pre-course liaison as appropriate.

Manage and undertake risk assessments relating to all aspects of Centre operations.

Monitor all aspects of Centre practice with a view to raising standards.

Liaise with other SRES Centres as required.

Undertake training as identified and appropriate to the effectively carrying out the duties of this post.

Adopt flexible working patterns.

To manage projects relating to specific buildings/facilities improvements.

To establish and maintain an in-house system for managing and monitoring the Working Time Directive.

To identify funding streams and submit bids as appropriate.

To manage the system for overnight cover at the Centre, in line with SRES modernisation.

To participate in the operation of the Council's Personal Performance Development Scheme.

It is your responsibility to carry out your duties in line with the Council's policy on equality and be sensitive and caring to the needs of the disadvantaged, promoting a positive approach to a harmonious working environment. You should act as an exemplar on these issues and should identify and monitor training for yourself and any employees for whom you are responsible, in line with this policy and the Equality Act 2010.

Such other duties as may be appropriate to achieve the objectives of the post to assist the Thematic Area in the fulfilment of its objectives commensurate with the post holder's salary grade, abilities and aptitudes.

The post holder must at all times carry out his/her responsibilities with due regard to the Council's policy, organisation and arrangements for Health and Safety at Work.



**This document is available in large print, Braille or audiotape on request.**

Date of Issue:

Ref: «Field2»

# Personnel Specification

# HR66

<b>Job Title</b> Head of Residential Education Centre	<b>Service area</b> Residential Education Centres	<b>Employer</b> SMBC
<b>Grade</b> SRES Tutorial 15 - 17	<b>Location</b> Frank Chapman Outdoor Education Centre	<b>Signature</b>

The Personnel Specification outlines the main attributes needed to adequately perform the post specified. In drawing together the specification, a critical examination of the job description has been undertaken to pinpoint those elements of the post deemed as essential.

The Personnel Specification is intended to give prospective candidates a better understanding of the post requirements. It will be used as part of the recruitment process in identifying and shortlisting candidates and in determining an applicant's suitability for employment, whilst giving due consideration to the need to make reasonable adjustments in line with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

	<b>Essential</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>How identified</b>
<b>1. Sickness Absence and Disability</b> What does the job require in the way of a satisfactory sickness absence record.  This criteria has been included on this specification for the candidate's information only.	Candidates should have less than 3 absences in the last 6 months or not more than 6 days absence over the 6 months period prior to the closing date of the post. Any absences relating to a disability or any other incapacity will be viewed sympathetically and will be considered if fully explained. Due regard will be made to the need to make reasonable adjustments in line with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. Smart, tidy appearance. Approachable manner. Good presence and speech.		Information obtained from successful candidate after conditional offer of employment has been made.
<b>2. Qualifications</b>			

	<b>Essential</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>How identified</b>
<p>What does the job require in the way of: -</p> <p>Level of formal qualifications required to carry out the job. Describe these by level of attainment and by subject matter where appropriate, e.g. Degree, HNC, Professional Qualifications, GCSE's, CIPFA etc. Consider carefully whether these are absolutely necessary.</p>	<p>Educated to degree level in appropriate subject.</p> <p>Should possess the following outdoor qualifications as a minimum: BCU L3 Kayak or Canoe coaching old scheme or BCU L2 new coaching scheme MLTUK SPA MLTUK WGL</p>		<p>Formal possession of an appropriate qualification to be verified at interview or from records.</p>
<p><b>3. Experience</b></p> <p>What does the job require in the way of: -</p> <p>Specific related job experience and in what type of working environment. What kind of life experience could supplement or replace this? Which is more important to the success of the job?</p>	<p>At least 5 years current or recent experience in residential outdoor education.</p> <p>At least 3 years experience of managing a section/department.</p> <p>At least 5 years experience of working with children.</p> <p>Successful team leadership experience.</p> <p>Experience of managing budgets.</p> <p>A range of experience in the following areas: &gt; Environmental Education &gt; Bushcraft</p>		<p>Past employment activity record. Performance in related selection methods, e.g. presentation, group discussion.</p>
<p><b>4. Training</b></p> <p>What does the job require in the way of: -</p> <p>Specific and/or specialist training in order to do the job, e.g. training in recruitment and selection, supervisory, management, inter-personal skills. Apprenticeship in a recognised trade. Practical training in the use of specific equipment, arc welding, word processing etc.</p>	<p>Good and recent training record.</p> <p>Ability and willingness to undertake H&amp;S, HR, premises, finance, general management and leadership, and learning practitioner related training.</p>		<p>Past training history from application form and records. Selection process by <b>demonstration</b> of ability to display knowledge and skills at the interview.</p>
<p><b>5. Special Knowledge</b></p> <p>What special knowledge is required in order to perform the job properly, e.g. a knowledge of employment legislation, accounting, financial planning regulations, languages, computer systems, local area etc?</p>	<p>Knowledge of High Quality Outdoor Education, LOTC, Adventurous Activities Licensing, H&amp;S in outdoor learning, Outdoor Learning sector.</p> <p>Knowledge of accounting principles, employment issues, ICT, people management.</p>		<p>Qualifications held and demonstration of knowledge at interview.</p>
<p><b>6. Circumstances (personal)</b></p>			

	<b>Essential</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>How identified</b>
What kind of personal circumstances are required to do the job properly? The ability to work shifts, weekends etc. The willingness and ability to travel and stay away from home. Willingness to live in if the job requires. Ability to drive, car ownership.	<p>Able to work some evenings, and to be flexible to meet Centre requirements.</p> <p>Able to work occasional weekends.</p> <p>Able to undertake overnight sleep-in duties as required, in rotation with other staff.</p> <p>Able to travel to meetings etc as part of SRES role.</p>		<p>Ensuring candidates are aware of these requirements from the job description.</p> <p>Interview questions and application form details.</p>

# The VARK Questionnaire Results

## 04/06/13

Your scores were:

- Visual: 2
- Aural: 4
- Read/Write: 6
- Kinesthetic: 5

You have a multimodal (ARK) learning preference.

Stu Meese

Kolb Inventory 06/04/2013

