

Implementing English, Maths and Functional Skills

Produced by



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T R I B A L

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Welcome to this *FE Week* supplement



Nick Summers
@SummersNicholas

This one-off *FE Week* special edition, sponsored by Tribal, takes an indepth look at the implementation of English, maths and functional skills. Produced in partnership with Tribal, it's the essential guide for making sense of any changes your organisation needs to make in the coming months.

Functional skills have been with us for some time now. They are available to any training provider wishing to offer students a qualification that not only teaches them the fundamentals of English, maths and ICT, but also how to apply them in the real world.

However, functional skills is about to be introduced to the further education sector in a big way, as from the start of October it becomes a compulsory part of the apprenticeship framework.

So is the further education sector ready to switch over to functional skills? You can find out the results of an *FE Week* survey asking that very question over on page 3. With more than 150 respondents from different apprenticeship providers, you might be surprised by some of the findings. Meanwhile, we also ask providers whether they feel that they've been given enough time and information to successfully transition from key skills.

Also on page 3 is an insight into one of the fastest-growing trends in the Functional skills space – outsourcing. As colleges and independent training providers increasingly look for support, some specialised companies have begun offering 'packages' of online learning tools to help them teach, track and assess their learners.

In our short feature we look at what has caused this growth, and ask whether we can expect this trend to continue in the coming months.

On page 4 and 5 we let the further education sector discuss their thoughts on functional skills. Sarah Benioff, a national apprenticeship director at the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) begins with her opinions on how the switch-over will affect other quality measures being introduced to the apprenticeship programme, such as the new 12 month minimum duration.

On the following page, however, you can hear some of the reservations of Stella Turner, qualifications & curriculum manager at the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP). Moving forward it illustrates how much we as a sector still need to consider.

One of the most understated and least-reported aspects of functional skills is how they are used to teach recruits in the Army. On page 6 Brigadier Gary Morris offers an exclusive insight into how the qualifications have been introduced by the Armed Forces, as well as what impact, if any, they have had on the overall performance of its soldiers.

The Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) has collated and produced

a range of materials online that can help your organisation implement functional skills effectively. On page 11 Rob Wye, chief executive of LSIS comments on why functional skills is important for our society, as well as how LSIS has been working with AELP to help prepare the sector for the October switchover.

What kind of a guide would this be without some handy resources to help you get started? On pages 12 to 14 we present one of the CPD activities produced by LSIS for the Excellence Gateway, as well as some guidance on where to access more information. It's a perfect way to get your staff up to speed.

Page 15 builds on this by examining the different delivery models that providers can use to deliver functional skills. The materials, originally produced by AELP, are a fantastic starting point if you're unsure of the advantages and disadvantages of each approach.

Implementing functional skills, or any other English and maths qualification, can sometimes feel like an insurmountable task. With this supplement though, we hope you can start to unpack and break down any concerns you may have about these qualifications, letting you get on with what you're best at – improving people's life chances.

**This supplement was produced by
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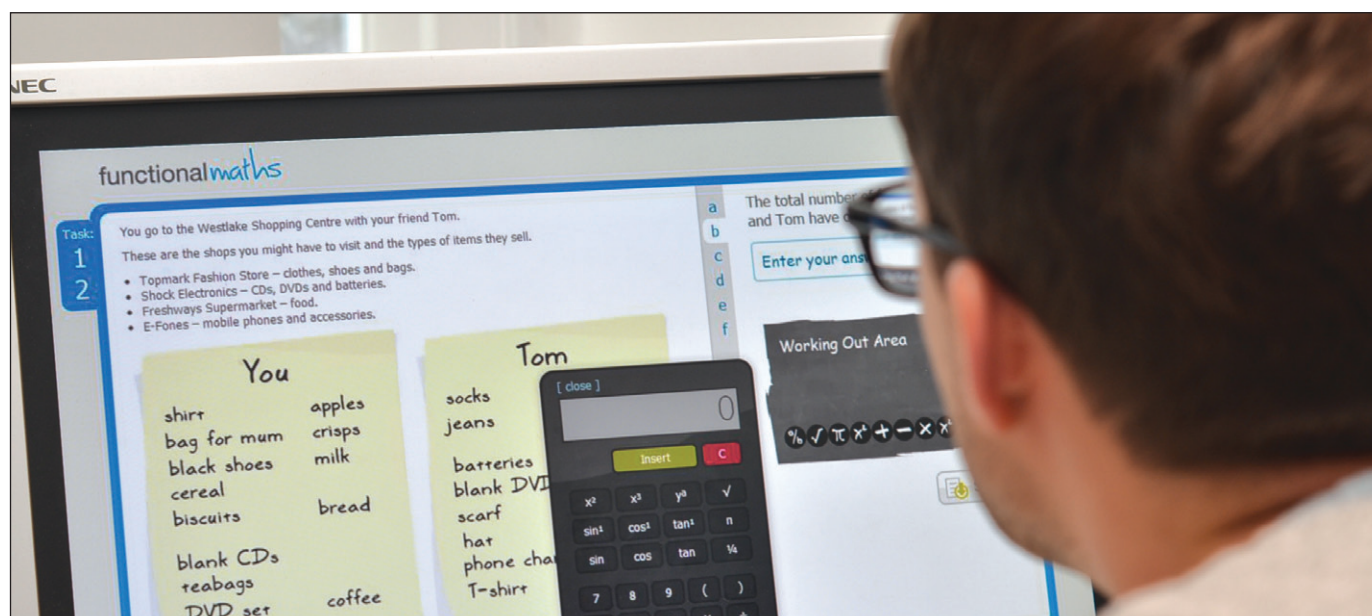
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Online resources on the rise

Training providers are increasingly using online English and maths resources. At the same time a growing number of companies are offering electronic learning packages which contain extensive learning resources, teaching and assessment tools.

It is an attractive option for any training provider that is still unsure how to teach functional skills, or doesn't have the time or funding to develop their own resources. Some of the biggest companies offering these digital packages, known as e-learning solutions, include Tribal, BKSBS, MindLeaders and Guroo.

Jonathan Wells, managing director of Guroo, told *FE Week* that it is the instant access in particular that attracts training providers to outsource some of the delivery.

"We get people towards a solution much

quicker than they would otherwise have done," he said. "We can set them off using well tried and tested initial assessment routines, as well as teaching and learning resources, without them having to develop any themselves."

Roger Francis, services and HR director at MindLeaders, adds that it is the associated cost and investment in staff training which is attracting providers.

"Training providers look at the sort of expertise that is required and realise that it's something which is very, very different from their normal area of expertise," Mr Francis told *FE Week*. "Somebody who is an assessor would have very easily been able to do key skills but for functional skills, without any sort of significant additional training, I think it would be almost impossible."

He added: "These big training providers,

and it's the same for colleges to some extent, either put all their staff through a significant training programme or they look at the option of outsourcing."

Aidan Brooks, account manager for Tribal and strategic advisor for unionlearn, told *FE Week* that the introduction of functional skills had brought a significant shift in requirements from providers.

He said: "We have acknowledged that the e-learning associated with key skills is no longer relevant and have developed an e-teaching platform that will develop and record a learners ability to apply process skills consistently across different contexts and scenarios.

"We are excited about developing a new suite of resources that will develop competence and importantly confidence in our learners."

BKSBS is in a unique position because it is owned by Vision West Nottinghamshire College and doesn't have to "satisfy shareholders", according to Giles Hall, the company's marketing manager.

However, most independent firms don't have the same advantage. This is the case for Guroo, set up in 2006, only a year before functional skills were introduced.

Although the funding given to training providers for the functional skills element is quite low, Mr Wells said this doesn't affect the company's profit margins.

"We've priced everything on a user basis rather than on an annual subscription," Mr Wells said. "So at least the costs of delivering functional skills using our resources is directly related to the income of the establishment."

However the funding rates set for functional skills has a more direct effect on MindLeaders. "If I'm brutally honest, the margins are very slim," Mr Francis said.

"We talk to a lot of people who say, look we love what you do, it sounds absolutely fantastic, but we simply can't afford it. We're operating at a price where the margins are very slim anyway, and we simply couldn't reduce the price any further."

From October, training providers will no longer be able to deliver key skills as part of an apprenticeship. Mr Hall predicts that as more providers switch to functional skills, the number of companies developing and offering e-learning solutions will increase.

"There has certainly been more competition over the last four or five years than there was prior to that when it was key skills," he said.

"Companies that produce software for education are always looking for different markets to move into, so I think that quite a lot of them look at functional skills as an area that has potential."

Ready for the switch? Our survey says...

An overwhelming majority of staff working for apprenticeship providers say they are ready to drop key skills completely and start delivering functional skills instead.

A survey conducted by Lsect, the publisher of *FE Week*, found that more than 80 per cent of professionals rated their organisation as a six or higher when asked, out of ten, if they were ready to start delivering functional skills. In contrast fewer than one in ten answered with a four or lower when responding to the same question.

Every apprenticeship provider will need to be delivering a functional skills qualification when it becomes a compulsory part of the apprenticeship framework from the start of October.

The latest findings from Lsect echo a similar survey published by the Association of Employment and Learning Providers

(AELP) in May, which revealed that 80 per cent of respondents were either 'confident' or 'fully confident' that they could successfully deliver functional skills by October 2012.

Paul Warner, director of employment and skills for AELP said he was confident the figure would have grown even further since their survey was conducted.

"There is no reason why it would have dropped off at any point since then," he said. "In terms of having systems in place, by and large providers are ready and are doing it."

However, not everyone believes that the sector is ready to stop delivering key skills completely. Jonathan Wells, managing director of Guroo, a company which offers a "complete solution" for training providers wanting to deliver functional skills, told *FE Week*: "I don't think for one second you can assume the market has completely moved over. It most certainly has not and I know

there are further education colleges who are actually registering people on to key skills qualifications as we speak."

Roger Francis, services and HR director at MindLeaders, another company offering an e-learning solution for functional skills, said he has also spoken with training providers who "haven't really thought it through".

However, he added that it would be difficult to assess the true scale of the problem before apprenticeship providers are forced to switch over to functional skills.

"I don't know what's going to happen in October quite frankly," he said. "It could be quite chaotic, because what people are doing - it comes down to the funding - is to look for the cheapest possible solution.

"It's all very well going for cheap solutions, but if it doesn't work and you're not actually getting people through the programme then your whole apprenticeship programme is in danger of collapsing."

The survey by Lsect also revealed that more than three quarters of professionals working for an apprenticeship provider felt that they had been given enough time to properly prepare for the full introduction of functional skills.

A further 67 per cent of respondents said they had also been given enough information to plan properly for the switchover.

"Organisations that planned ahead and took a whole organisation approach to functional skills, so looking at who they had in terms of staff members, how they actually structure those people and train them up to embrace functional skills, are already up and running with it," Giles Hall, marketing manager for BKSBS said.

"Others that buried their heads in the sand and carried on just with key skills, thinking it was exactly the same, there may be a bit of a problem."

A springboard to career success

Functional skills are part of the agenda to raise apprenticeship standards. In April 2011, they became part of the mandatory components of all apprenticeship frameworks within the Specification for Apprenticeship Standards in England (SASE).

Functional skills have been designed to give young people and adults the necessary practical skills for work, education and everyday life, as well as the ability to apply these skills.

They are about applying knowledge in real situations. As employers, we all look for individuals who can not only do the job on paper, but who can practically apply what they know to how they do their job. This is why they are referred to as 'practical skills' in English, maths and information and communications technology (ICT).

Through these skills, individuals can build a well-rounded skill set including communication, numeracy and ICT skills, and learn to apply these across a range of work situations supporting areas such as team working and problem solving. These are the skills that can be a springboard to career success and progression, and employers value such skills in their staff as they help to create a more responsive and enterprising workforce.

We are mindful of the demands we are placing on providers and employers, particularly as we implement other quality measures

The agreed minimum requirement for functional skills qualifications in apprenticeship frameworks is English and mathematics at level 1 for intermediate level apprenticeships and level 2 for an advanced level apprenticeship.

These qualifications are built into frameworks to make sure that apprenticeships, as jobs with accompanying skills development programmes, give apprentices the



complete package they need for their immediate and future career progression.

As the replacement for key skills, functional skills have been phased in to enable providers to run the qualifications simultaneously as they prepare for full implementation. Our data shows that approximately one fifth of apprenticeship providers have already moved to functional skills.

However we are mindful of the demands we're placing on providers and employers, particularly as we implement other quality measures such as the minimum duration for all apprenticeships.

This prescribes that all new 16-18 apprenticeships will be expected to last at least a year. This will also apply to apprentices 19 and over unless they have prior learning and reduced funding is claimed as a result.

The Skills Funding Agency, LSIS and AELP have been providing guidance and support around functional skills for some time and we would encourage providers to access and use this.

Apprenticeships have a vital role to play in helping to grow our economy, up-skill our employees and offer opportunities to young people – especially those who are unemployed.

It's vital that we do everything we can to make apprenticeships and their content as high quality an experience as they can possibly be.

Sarah Benioff is national apprenticeship director for quality, programme and the apprenticeship vacancy service at the National Apprenticeship Service

Skills: A function of the individual?

Nobody can doubt the success of Great Britain at London 2012. It was a fabulous Olympic Games with unprecedented success for GB competitors. Years and years of hard work, dedication and sacrifice were required for everyone who competed at the games, whatever their sport.

However, each individual had their own goal and their own unique and personalised plan to get there. Medal winners in the endurance events will have spent long hours on the road, on the bike or on the rowing machines. Those sports which call for explosive speed and power – like weightlifting or gymnastics – call for a completely different training approach.

So, what has this to do with functional skills? At Learndirect we believe in training and learning approaches that are right for the individual and their circumstances. Some people require long programmes of learning leading to a full qualification whilst for others a short, bite-size qualification makes more sense for them and the way they live their lives. Therefore, for us, it is important to provide a range of options for a range of people – it really is the case that one size does not fit all.

With the UK still facing such huge issues of poor maths and English skills amongst adults, there is no doubt much more still needs to be done. At learndirect we broadly support the move to functional skills, and welcome that they have been designed to meet the needs of employers, as well as give learners a more practical set of skills which they can apply in their daily lives.

It is important to provide a range of options for a range of people - it really is the case that one size does not fit all

We believe it is entirely right those people on programmes, like apprenticeships, which usually take a year, at least, to complete are obliged to take the longer maths and English qualifications as well and look to achieve



functional skills qualifications. As such we have designed a service where apprentices can do their maths and English functional skills online and supported remotely, freeing up valuable assessor and manager time to focus on the practical elements of the qualification.

However, we are concerned about the suitability of functional skills for some groups of adults, like those with the lowest skills levels, or for adults looking to get back into work, who often want shorter, top up, bite-sized qualifications to help them secure and sustain employment. For these learners we have welcomed the development of QCF Awards and Certificates in English and maths skills. These alternative qualifications will allow for flexible sizes and levels of maths and English qualifications and can also provide a good foundation for progression on to functional skills.

We will be supporting learners through all these qualifications using a blended approach with online materials, face to face or remote tutors, web based learning platforms and communities.

If the UK is really going to deliver the 'world class skills' as outlined by Leitch in his seminal review in 2006, we need to ensure we give people options that are right for them and that fit with their lifestyles. By doing this we can reap the rewards of a flexible and tailored skills system just like our world class Olympic champions succeeded through their bespoke training programmes.

Deborah Rosado is sales director at Learndirect

Meeting the challenge for apprentices

The Association of Employment and Learning Providers has long been concerned about the introduction of functional skills into apprenticeship frameworks, despite the lead-in time that John Hayes granted.

It remains our view that in the short term functional skills tests are likely to have a negative impact on framework achievement rates.

Our other major concern is that in a relative short period of learning, work-based learning providers are being asked to pick up the pieces after the failure of 11 years of statutory schooling to equip many young people with basic competency in English, maths and ICT.

Moreover, they are being asked to put things right at a tiny fraction of the previous cost. A further worry is the impact that functional skills may have on successful apprenticeship completions by learners with learning difficulties or disabilities.

Employer engagement has proved to be a significant challenge, with a large number of providers calling for support in this area through good practice materials and case studies from other providers who have successfully sold the benefits of functional skills to their employers.

There is no underestimating the scale of the challenge facing providers who are being required to equip young people with functional skills

Having said that, we recognise that the introduction of functional skills to apprenticeships has advantages. For apprentices, the achievement of functional skills will provide a basis for developing their other employability skills, will help them learn, increase their confidence, and enhance their career prospects.

Employers benefit as well because the changing context of work means that if their apprentices can apply their skills to new situations and challenges, this will

lead to greater efficiency, productivity and competitiveness.

The main challenge for training organisations is that more time needs to be devoted to the teaching of skills and then developing the learner's ability to use the skills to solve problems in real-life contexts.

The replacement of key skills with functional skills has also required a very significant amount of development work for providers. The difficulties to be overcome in order to deliver functional skills in dispersed, employer-based provision are well documented and include availability of on-demand testing and timeliness of results.

The challenges are far greater than for classroom-based delivery. New and different learning resources are also required, as is a different type of teaching skill.

However a survey in May reported that 80 per cent of providers were confident that they could successfully deliver functional skills.

In partnership with LSIS and others, AELP has offered guidance to providers on preparedness and best practice, including a free practical guide 'Moving from key skills to functional skills', which can be downloaded from the AELP website.

The guide makes clear that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to embedding functional skills into an apprenticeship programme, recognising that every employer and workplace is different. It recommends that providers look at the different models that are available and to talk to other providers who already have functional skills integrated into their programmes.

Matters to consider include the planning of the learning provision; how much of it should be discrete/off-job or embedded/on-job; whether it should be conducted in-house or outsourced; and whether collaborative arrangements might be the best way forward.

Providers have also been busy reviewing the required resources, although as one AELP member put it, "There are an awful lot of resources out there, so make sure you're not reinventing the wheel".

They cover initial assessment tools; individual learning plans for recording opportunities for apprentices to develop, practise and apply functional skills; teaching materials; the learning environment; and the availability of a functional skills starter kit from the LSIS Excellence Gateway.

With the new Ofsted Common Inspection Framework's emphasis on the quality of teaching and learning,



Stella Turner,
qualifications & curriculum manager at AELP

For apprentices, the achievement of functional skills will provide a basis for developing other employability skills

providers are advised to teach the basics before providing opportunities to apply skills. Functional skills should be included in all schemes of work, lesson plans and vocational learning materials, while apprentices should also be taught

exam techniques.

Other key advice is to shop around before appointing an awarding body, as assessment approaches and arrangements vary. About 15 awarding bodies offer functional skills but not all offer them at all levels.

There is no underestimating the scale of the challenge facing providers who are being required to equip young people with functional skills that 11 years of compulsory schooling were unable to provide.

But functional skills will help apprentices succeed in all components of their framework, including their vocational learning and personal, learning and thinking skills.

Ultimately, they will impact on a provider's rates of retention, achievement and progression, so it is vital that the best possible preparation for their introduction is being implemented.

'Significant benefits' for the armed forces

Each year the Army recruit in the region of 8,000 young men and women. Up to 50 per cent of those joining in any one year will have literacy or numeracy skills below level 1.

The increasing disparity between recruit entry standards of literacy and numeracy and the technical requirements of military service led the Army, in 2003, to introduce a basic skills programme. The aim in short, was to get all Army personnel to level 1 in both literacy and numeracy within three years of joining. To meet this aspiration the Army established a network of about 40 basic skills tutors, based in Army education centres across the UK, Germany and Cyprus. These tutors are often supported by partnership arrangements with local further education colleges, delivering intensive one week level 1 literacy and numeracy courses within the centres.

The success of this programme has been publicly acknowledged, with a recent study confirming both the merit of continuing (selectively) to recruit entrants with low level skills and train them, as well as the positive impact such learning

has on the overall effectiveness of the individual.

Army education centres are not the only place for soldiers to develop their literacy and numeracy. Since 2008 the Army has been running one of the largest apprenticeship programmes in the UK and many of the 8,000 recruits joining the Army this year will enrol on an apprenticeship of some kind.

They seem to be a more robust, more demanding and better measure of someone's actual ability

A key part of the apprenticeship is the underpinning skills required of it and

thus, most young soldiers will now gain their level 1 functional skills in maths and English through this programme.

This success of the basic skills and Army apprenticeship programme, as well as the move to adopting functional skills, has prompted the Army to go a step further – now requiring its senior non-commissioned officers and warrant officers, the Army's middle managers, to have a level 2 qualification in both subjects.

Have functional skills made a big difference? It may be too early to tell, but the general consensus from soldiers, tutors and their managers is that they seem to be a more robust, more demanding and better measure of someone's actual ability. In line with Armed Forces policy, the Army moved from using basic skills awards as accredited measures of literacy and numeracy skills towards the wholesale adoption of functional skills qualifications and provision last month.

So put simply, the Army has seen that improving the literacy and numeracy skills of its recruits, its soldiers and



its managers has produced significant benefits. Soldiers are better able to cope with the demands of training, they are more confident in their ability, can better cope with increasingly technical equipment and can assume new and more demanding responsibilities in fast-changing operational environments.

Brigadier Gary Morris is director of educational and training services in the Army

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Concerns over transition and awareness

Improving the English and maths skills of adults has been, and remains a priority for unions. Over the past decades, unions have played a key role in bringing English and maths work into the workplace, across all sectors and at all levels. Over the past 10 years, union learning reps have engaged tens of thousands of workers in skills for life programmes, including over 20,000 union learners following courses last year. English and maths are a fundamental plank of most Union Learning Fund projects. This is a core part of our work.

Unions and union learners like functional skills. They fit with the ethos and focus of much of union learning. Whether as part of apprenticeship programmes, or as a practical and contextualised approach to learning English and maths, functional skills make a lot of sense to our learners. And so the introduction of functional skills has been something that unionlearn and the unions have supported, and been actively engaged in promoting.

Functional skills address the frequently neglected curriculum areas of writing, speaking, listening and communications

We welcome the breadth of functional skills and the emphasis not only on skills development, but also on equipping learners to apply them in relevant and meaningful contexts. Functional skills also address the frequently neglected curriculum areas of writing, speaking, listening and communications that are so important for the workplace.

What teachers and learners alike appreciate about the functional skills framework is its foundation in working and life contexts, and a fuller assessment of a wider skills range than was the case with the adult literacy and numeracy assessments.

So, given the positive response that there has been among unions to functional skills, what might hamper their introduction? Currently, I can see

two main areas where there is difficulty: the transition for providers, particularly where functional skills are being offered as discrete qualifications; and the awareness and take-up of functional skills by employers.

As has been the case in the past with the introduction of new assessments, the move to functional skills presents union learning centres with challenges. New assessment models, the range of awarding body options, the availability of online, on-demand assessment, in-house assessment models for speaking and listening. All of these are raising questions that unions are raising with us.

Behind these, models for funding learning are the subject of current discussions with college and other provider partners. Certainly, from reports from the centres, we are not sure that the funding of discrete programmes for adults in workplace contexts is currently sufficient to ensure quality learning. We shall see. Moreover, the TUC is concerned that the speed of the transition will not give sufficient time for unions and provider partners to plan and ensure that provision meets the needs of workplace learners most in need of support.

Our concerns are for learners who face the most barriers, including those at lower levels, from disadvantaged groups and in jobs where flexible delivery is crucial. Functional skills are unlikely to be a 'one-size-fits-all' solution for workplace learners.

Employer engagement remains a key issue. While some employers have taken up and championed functional skills, far too many are reluctant to make opportunities available to staff. In the worst cases, employers look to see how little can be done to ensure the acquisition of good skills.

Unionlearn will equip union learning representatives with a good understanding of how to support learners, and work with providers on flexible delivery and relevant contexts for members, whilst getting employers on board too.

Providers, both those that are working with unions, and others that would like to, are very clear that working with unions will be very important to them to support delivery of workplace functional skills to help address the barriers we'll all come across, e.g. getting employers onside, encouraging and supporting learners, helping with flexible delivery models including supporting learners outside taught sessions, providing real life scenarios for context and problem solving.

Unionlearn's current programme is



Judith Swift,

union development manager, Unionlearn

We are not sure that the funding of discrete programmes for adults in workplace contexts is currently sufficient to ensure quality learning

looking to address issues with functional skills – we want to make them work.

We are briefing our unions and union learning reps on the changes. We have developed training, resources and a support programme for centres. But we recognise that the process will need some longer-term input. A national task group, bringing unions and partners together, is exploring what is needed to embed functional skills. This will include looking at alternative routes for particular groups of learners as appropriate.

Through our programmes, unions are working to make functional skills a success, for our learners and for the wider benefits their acquisition will bring, both in the workplace and beyond.

In the next year, we need government, providers and funders to keep their focus on this crucial area of learning, and be ready to adjust the structure and processes where necessary, so that this success is possible. Our learners deserve nothing less.

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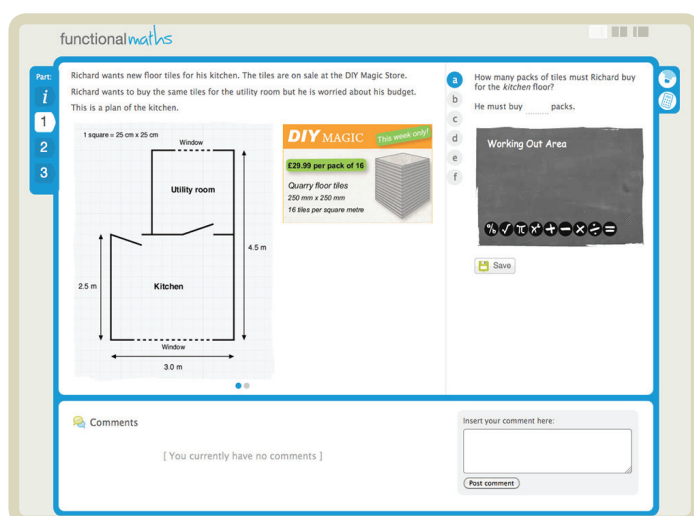
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Advertorial

A turbulent year ahead for FE providers

As the learning and skills sector welcomes the class of 2012, throughout England teachers, trainers and tutors are doing so in the knowledge that terms such as literacy and numeracy, communication and application of number are now redundant and that English and mathematics have become the common parlance for what not so very long ago we called 'basic skills'.

It has certainly been an exciting summer and not just in the world of sport. The examination results season has again brought with it the annual controversy around pupil and student performance. This year, though, is an exception. The Government is not celebrating another year-on-year increase in pupil achievements but an actual decline in performance.

The official line from the regulator, Ofqual, is that this decline is because awarding organisations have moved the grade boundaries, marked more strictly and adhered more closely to the rules. As an example we are told that they have penalised poor spelling, punctuation and grammar in the GCSE English language examination.

Further education colleges and training providers will be expected to rebuild shattered confidence or re-establish trust

These results are being challenged but whatever the outcome of any judicial review, impartial report or re-marking of scripts, one element remains as consistent as ever. Once again providers in the learning and skills sector are going to be inducting many individuals who feel disappointed and dejected because, through no fault of their own, their summer examination papers were placed in the front line of the standards debate. Further education colleges and training providers alike will be expected to rebuild shattered confidence or re-establish trust in the minds of this country's most precious resources – our young people.

All of this at a time when the sector

was already gearing up to raise its game in terms of the English and mathematics courses and programmes on offer and the qualifications learners will be expected to achieve. The September 2012 intake is the first to follow the Wolf Review. For those who missed it, GCSE English and mathematics at A*-C are now the 'gold standard' for everyone in education and training.

All individuals who are capable are now expected to have access to courses and programmes leading to level 2 qualifications in English and mathematics, ideally GCSE. In addition this cohort will become the first working towards apprenticeship frameworks where key skills have been totally replaced by the functional skills.

These are not the only developments where English and mathematics education is being refreshed, revitalised or revolutionised.

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) have set up a distance travelled pathfinder designed to respond to Her Majesty's Treasury's (HMT) requirement to find a better way than through qualification achievements of incentivising learners and providers to improve English and mathematics capability. The pathfinder will involve 18 providers designed to represent the sector's types of learners and contexts for learning.

The pathfinder will explore different approaches to monitor and measure an individual's progress in English and mathematics during 2012-13. The intention here is to see whether it is possible to encourage and reward providers for the measurable impact of teaching on the learning of their students by assessing their learning and skills gain in English and mathematics.

The outcomes of this pathfinder have the potential for enormous and far reaching implications for how the sector is funded and boosted in the future.

The Wolf Report signalled the demise of the key skills and skills for life qualifications and, depending upon which awarding organisation a provider works with, the date for final registrations was August 31 or September 30. In order to bridge the gap for those learners who need a different approach to progressing to level 2 the sector is about to be offered a new range of modular or unitised English and mathematics qualifications.

These new qualifications are designed to provide a progressive framework or additional scaffolding to enable young people and adults to develop the underpinning skills as well as basic proficiency in these core subjects. These



Barry Brooks,

strategy and partnerships director, Tribal

Providers in the learning and skills sector are going to be inducting many individuals who feel disappointed and dejected

qualifications were due to be available to the sector in June of this year to enable colleges to prepare for the start of the new

term. Such are the sensitivities around English and mathematics qualifications I understand that Ofqual has insisted on undertaking an additional level of scrutiny before approving them.

So a challenging and exciting 12 months lie ahead for the sector; whilst in the margins we can also monitor the Government's plans for more rigorous qualifications to replace GCSEs, perhaps delivered by a single awarding organisation.

Just to add an extra dimension, there will, of course, be the preparations for the class of 2013, which for the first time, will include those young people affected by the raising of the participation age to 17.

All in all then, a tumultuous year for English and mathematics education and, for what I suppose is, business as usual for those teachers, tutors and trainers working across the learning and skills sector.

Our sector is ready to rise to the challenge

Now that the last registration date for key skills qualifications is fast approaching, functional skills are even higher on the agenda within our sector. As a mandatory component of apprenticeship programmes, these skills are also now an important element of Ofsted's new Common Inspection Framework (CIF). Providers, as well as employers, are facing the challenge of enhancing their programmes and upskilling their staff, to ensure that their learners and employees have the opportunities to develop and practise these skills to meet the new demands of the functional skills summative assessment.

LSIS's number one priority for the sector is to support the provision of excellent teaching and learning, so naturally we welcome the increased emphasis on the functionality of English and maths skills within the new CIF. It is also recognition of the important role further education providers play in enabling learners progress to the next stage of their education, training and employment. By helping learners to apply these skills in a variety of contexts,

providers and employers will also be equipping their learners with the ability to progress in life, as well as study.

It is crucial that practitioners are able to identify their learners' skills gaps

The 2011 BIS 'skills for life' survey highlighted that those with functional skills below level 2 may find every day tasks such as comparing products and services for the best buys, or working out household budgets, a struggle. It is therefore crucial that practitioners are able to identify their learners' skills gaps at the outset of their learning programmes. Learning plans can be developed for each learner so that they are able to practise the skills in contexts

that are meaningful and motivational. Teachers also need to be confident about their own personal skills in English and maths if their learners are to progress. Therefore, functional skills are more than a qualification, they are about helping learners survive and thrive.

The demands of the introduction of functional skills are something that all of us in the sector are aware of, and some practitioners may be anxious of the demands of this new direction. However, there is support available, and practitioners have been taking advantage of these opportunities. Earlier this year AELP, supported by LSIS, held two national conferences on the topic; within days of being advertised all places were taken. Other tools have been produced: Moving from key skills to functional skills produced by AELP, also in collaboration with LSIS, helps training providers prepare to deliver functional skills in apprenticeships.

Further support is available in the form of CPD programmes to develop practitioners' skills in topics such as initial and diagnostic assessment, problem solving and team teaching.



As stated in New Challenges, New Chances, our sector should fuel individual achievement, power the common good and drive upward economic performance. The introduction of functional skills has created a challenge for our sector, but it is challenge we can rise to, and one that will allow us to support our learners in order for them to achieve their potential.

Rob Wye is chief executive of the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS)

Advertorial

The answer is core skills and knowledge

In the right setting, with the right learners, functional skills can transform lives. Over the next few months, OCR is planning to roll out on-screen, on-demand functional skills assessments in English, maths and ICT, which are based on real-life scenarios and give people the freedom to apply skills as flexibly as possible to solve problems. These tests will be far more accessible to a wider audience.

What you see in our new approach to English and maths for adult learners is what you get

We know that for some learners however, the emphasis on skills application and on problem solving within functional skills can be challenging, especially for those adults taking their first steps in English or maths.

An estimated five million people of

working age in the UK lack basic literacy or numeracy skills, and that's probably an underestimation. Addressing the issue of poor literacy and numeracy is crucial for growing our economy. A new focus on English and maths has been part of the strategy of the coalition government which committed funding for those who didn't get English and maths at school to continue to make progress in these core areas up to and including level 2.

Before I joined OCR, I was principal of Oaklands College in Hertfordshire where literacy and numeracy programmes were key. Prior to that, I was deputy director of further education strategy at the DfES, having originally joined the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit back in 2003. Identifying ways to support the learning of English and maths has been a constant in my career.

So I've been very excited at OCR that we've taken a fresh look at how to support adults' core English and maths skills, especially given the vacuum created by the ending of the popular basic skills. OCR has been able to draw on its own heritage, particularly the introduction of the first practical skills profile by RSA in the 1980s, to guide thinking on how to develop new qualifications for English and maths. What do adults really need?

The answer, we think, is core skills and knowledge in English and maths, simple, straightforward assessment and a bite-sized, credit-based framework. We also want to be able to offer learners and trainers something that is flexible, that can be a stand-alone achievement or be a stepping stone to other qualifications, such as functional skills or GCSEs.

Our approach has also been shaped by close working with education resource specialists Tribal over the last 18 months. Headed up by my old DfES adult basic skills colleague, Barry Brooks, Tribal is developing new resources to support the teaching and learning of core English and maths skills. Tribal has been committed to getting the teaching right. Both our organisations believe that there is plenty of potential that has never been fully developed in this area under the existing skills banner.

It's always important to listen to what trainers and employers say are the skills that they want to see in adults entering the workplace. This has informed our development all the way along but, above all, we've kept it simple, so what you see in our new approach to English and maths for adult learners is what you get. We've tried to avoid the mistake of over-elaborate assessment.



So, subject to Ofqual accreditation for our online functional skills and our new qualifications in English and maths, the coming months will see some very exciting developments from OCR which combine the benefits of new technology with a focus on content that really counts.

Earlier this year, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills declared that they wanted excellence in teaching and learning with a focus on getting maths and English right as part of vocational education programmes. I think we are contributing to that.

Mark Dawe is chief executive of OCR

LSIS resources: Assessment for Learning

LSIS has published a whole library of resources online (www.excellencegateway.org.uk/beingfunctional) to help you introduce functional skills effectively. The following pages explain a CPD activity designed to help you and your staff think about the key elements of functional skills assessment.

1

1. Share the first learning objective (you will identify the benefits for learner progression of embedding assessment for learning in functional skills delivery) with the participants.

2. Share with participants that during this stage of the activity they will model features of an assessment for learning approach. They will check learning and generate constructive feedback, use feedback as an opportunity to improve their work and review the effectiveness of current practice. They will contribute to a learning conversation that will help them identify where and how to focus their efforts.

2

1. Ask participants to work in groups of four or five. It would be beneficial to arrange each group so that it contains an English, ICT and mathematics teacher and one or two teachers from vocational or other programmes of learning.

2. Place the Strategic issue 1 card with its associated 'lead question' cards from the functional skills progression cards on the table. The 'discussion prompts' side of the cards should be face down.

Note: Downloaded the cards via the Excellence Gateway.

4

1. Ask each group to look at a different lead question and note down on the flip chart paper or whiteboard up to four or five sub-questions that would help them 'unpack' each lead question.

Explain to the groups that this part of the activity uses a coaching approach that depends on asking questions rather than providing answers or proposing solutions.

2. Tell participants to turn over the cards and look at the discussion prompts.

3

1. Ask participants to use the prompts, along with their sub-questions, as a basis for discussion in which they might explore some solutions.

Ask a member of each group to note key points on the flip chart or whiteboard.

2. Ask a representative from each group to feed back key messages and ideas about the lead question they have discussed to the whole group.

5

1. Ask participants to reflect on:

- The benefits of assessment for learning for learners developing their functional skills;
- The questioning skills needed by functional skills teachers and learners developing their functional skills;
- how effective questioning skills are important aspects of problem-solving; and
- How this approach, using strategy and lead question cards, could be used to help learners with the problem-solving skills they are expected to develop to be fully functional in English, mathematics and ICT.

6

1. Show teachers Sheet 1.1 Quick start guide to Assessment for learning. Ask them to share with other members of their group examples of how they currently use or might use the different elements of assessment for learning.

2. At this point you might also check participants' understanding of initial, diagnostic, ongoing and summative assessment and refer them to the functional skills glossary.

Note: Download and print the Quick start guide to Assessment through the Excellence Gateway.

8

1. Ask participants to reflect on:

- How the skills and techniques identified in points 9 and 10 can be used for initial, diagnostic, ongoing and summative assessment;
- What skills and techniques they might need to develop in order to use assessment for learning effectively with learners developing their functional skills;
- Which colleagues (such as teachers of vocational and other main programmes of learning) they might work with in order to ensure that a range of skills and techniques are introduced into their sessions to support functional skills assessment.

7

1. Ask participants to reflect on:

- Which colleagues (such as teachers of vocational and other main programmes of learning) they might work with in order to ensure that a range of skills and techniques are introduced into their sessions to support functional skills assessment for learning;
- How assessment for learning might improve achievement in summative assessment and how assessment for learning might support equality and diversity.

2. Ask participants to record thoughts in their reflection log.

! Other materials from LSIS include an interactive functional skills readiness tool, support and guidance on assessment for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, as well as learner-facing resources and other CPD activities. Just type www.excellencegateway.org.uk/beingfunctional into your internet browser to find out more!

9

1. Share the second learning objective (you will be able to design and use assessment activities and materials for functional skills based on active learning approaches to motivate and engage different types of learners) with participants.
2. Tell participants that they will be modelling features of an experiential approach during this and the next stage of the activity. They will experience the 'hands-on' learning that motivates and engages learners. They will experiment with resources in order to support deep learning for their learners.

10

1. If participants are unfamiliar with this approach, you might show them Sheet 1.2 Quick start guide to experiential learning.
2. Ask participants to think about one particular learner. This may be an actual learner they have worked with recently or know well. Ask participants to pick out key details of their learner's level and characteristics (such as lacking in trust, or being well motivated or over-confident) and describe them to the rest of the group. Note down key characteristics on the flip chart or whiteboard.

12

1. Ask participants to work in groups of three. One participant will take the role of the functional skills tutor; one will role play or put themselves in the position of one of their learners; the third participant will act as observer. The 'learner' should outline to the teacher and observer the level and characteristics of the learner they are representing. Participants may find it useful during this role play to take the position of a learner from a different cultural or ethnic background or with a particular learning difficulty or disability to further explore potential barriers to learning. Share the instructions for all the roles with the whole group.

11

1. Hand the 'teacher' in each group the five sets of functional skills self-assessment cards and Sheet 1.3 Guidance notes for the card sort. Depending on the time available, 'teachers' should select cards from only two or three sets. For example, they might use cards from the 'Being functional' and English sets or five cards each from the problem-solving and ICT sets.
2. Make a selection that you think is most likely to be relevant to the 'learner'. Discuss your choice with the 'learner', who should be encouraged to question or confirm your choice before deciding together on the most relevant selection.

13

1. Ask the 'teacher' in each pair to read the guidance notes and carry out the card sort with their 'learner'. The 'teacher' should encourage the 'learner' to take the lead in the activity.
2. Ask the observer to note down the skills needed by the 'teacher' for the activity to be effective; the skills needed by the 'learner' for the activity to be effective; the skills needed by the 'teacher' to assess the level of functional skills the learner has achieved; the problem-solving skills developed by the activity; and how well the activity identified the level of functional skills the 'learner' had assessed.

14

1. Ask observers to feed back to the whole group.
2. Ask participants to reflect on:
 - The functional skills used in the activity itself (for example, reading, speaking, listening or sorting skills);
 - How the activity might involve ICT (for example, asking learners to word process a list of skills or sort the skills using a spreadsheet);
 - Who led the conversations within the activity: the 'teacher' or the 'learner'?

16

1. Ask participants to reflect on:
 - How they could adapt this activity for use with different groups of learners;
 - To what extent role playing as a learner stimulated questioning or discussion on how learners can be stereotyped rather than being treated as individuals;
 - When they might use this activity with their learners (for example, during initial assessment or half way through the programme of learning);

15

1. Ask participants to reflect on:
 - The support the teacher and learner might need in effective questioning and affirmation skills to support this activity; how an effective initial assessment will ensure achievement in summative assessment; and
 - The active learning approach in this activity and other active approaches that might be used.
2. If time allows, ask participants to work in pairs or small groups to discuss how the repurposed resource supports an experiential approach to assessment for learning.

17

1. Share the third learning objective (you will plan with others to embed the initial, diagnostic and formative assessment of functional skills at appropriate stages of the learner journey) with participants.

2. You may need to remind them of the stages of the learner journey which are listed in the discussion prompts of the functional skills progression cards.

18

1. Tell participants that in this stage of the activity they will have the opportunity to scan other resources that relate to functional skills assessment.

2. Tell them that there will not be time for an in-depth exploration and that the purpose of this stage of the activity is to gain awareness of the resources and how they are appropriate for different stages of the learner journey.

19

1. Ask participants to work in pairs or small groups. Distribute amongst the pairs or groups copies of the following resources:

- Assessment for learning booklet
- Initial and diagnostic assessment booklet
- Initial assessment logbook
- Using skills checks booklet and
- Assessment for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities booklet

Note: Download these from the Excellence Gateway website.

20

1. Ask the groups to consider the resources in terms of one of the following issues. (The facilitator may wish to ask all groups to focus on the same issue, assign one to each group or allow groups to pick the most relevant). They might consider:

- Which stage of the learner journey it supports;
- How it might inform individual learning plans (ILPs);
- How it supports assessment for English, mathematics and ICT;
- How it supports assessment at different levels;
- How it supports a problem-solving approach.

21

1. They might also consider:

- How it could be amended or developed further to meet the needs of their learners developing their functional skills;
- How colleagues delivering vocational or other main programmes of learning might be made aware of (or involved in) carrying out the assessment activities; and
- The next steps in embedding initial, diagnostic and formative assessment of functional skills at appropriate stages of their learners' journeys.

2. The group may wish to use Sheet 1.5 to record comments.

22

1. Share the fourth learning objective (plan with others to design functional skills learning sessions that support assessment for learning and differentiation) with participants.

2. Ask participants to work in their small groups to make an initial draft for a learning session that:
- Includes functional skills, uses an assessment for learning approach and supports differentiation.
 - It is important for participants to think about how they might involve vocational colleagues in contextualising functional skills activities.

23

1. Ask participants to reflect on what they have learned and how they have learned it. In particular, ask them to reflect on:

- How they can share good assessment for learning practices with colleagues;
- Who can support them in preparing and carrying out functional skills assessment;
- How the materials and activities used in the session might be used to support learner progression;
- How to share effective assessment for learning and active learning approaches;

24

Ask participants to reflect on:

- How the materials and activities used in the session might be used with their learners; and
- How CPD sessions on 'whole organisation approach for functional skills' and 'embedding functional skills into the curriculum' can further support assessment for learning. Remind participants that it would be useful for them to record their thoughts, and any agreed next steps and their impact in their reflection log.



Which delivery model should I use?*

Embedded/ On the job delivery

Benefits?

- Learning takes place in real-life situations.
- Apprentice will understand the relevance to their work.
- Apprentice should learn to recognise opportunities to develop their skills.
- All aspects of training will be seen to be delivered by a single, co-ordinated team.

Drawbacks?

- Opportunities for learning could be missed or taken for granted.
- Learning may lack structure.
- Insufficient support and co-ordination.

Solutions?

- Make functional skills explicit from the start.
- Help apprentice recognise when they are applying their functional skills.
- Agree clear roles and responsibilities within the delivery team.
- Ensure all members of the delivery team are appropriately trained.
- Check workplace supervisor is fully on-board and able to identify opportunities for learning.
- Provide regular opportunities for collaboration, feedback and progress reviews.

Solutions?

- Tailor learning activities and resources to work context so functional skills are more meaningful.
- Make links with work clear.

Drawbacks?

- Functional skills may not be developed in a relevant context.

Benefits?

- Learning can be logically sequenced and allow for practice and application in the workplace.
- Time is dedicated for developing skills. Teaching is by specialists.

Discrete/ Off the job delivery

Solutions?

- Ensure that the benefits of functional skills are explained to employer.
- Provide workplace supervisor with support to identify suitable projects or tasks.
- Involve supervisor in the development of individual learning plans (ILPs). Offer training in coaching skills.

Benefits?

- Learning takes place in real-life situations.
- Apprentice will understand the relevance to their work.
- Apprentice should learn to recognise opportunities to develop their skills.
- All aspects of training will be seen to be delivered by a single, co-ordinated team.

Drawbacks?

- There may be insufficient cooperation from the employer.
- Not enough awareness of the kinds of projects or tasks that can develop functional skills.
- Workplace supervisor may lack coaching skills.

Partly/ mostly embedded delivery

*These materials have been reproduced with permission from the Association of Employment and Learning Providers.

Useful advice from other providers!

As part of an Lsect survey (see results on page 3), we asked respondents to give us their top tips for delivering functional skills. We've published some of our favourites below!

Lesley Ellis, Managing Director of Inter Training Services Ltd: "Identify (or adopt from another organisation) a functional skills champion. The biggest hurdle is not the curriculum change, it's the resistance to change."

Beth French, adult learning service manager at Bucks County Council: "Really think out the practicalities - who does what and how? Think about whether the apprentice can even achieve the level of functional skills they need for the apprenticeship they are embarking on."

Angela Middleton, CEO of MiddletonMurray: "Don't compare it to key skills, just take it as an opportunity to review and improve delivery."

Fiona Joy, lead teacher (learning support) for Hull Training: "Get a good learning support system in place and use it. Improve your initial assessment procedure and use that to get your levels right. Teach to the level of the learner, not the level required for the framework."

Lee Jordan, development consultant at Working Links: "Find a suitable initial assessment and diagnostic tool. Explore the quality of learning materials available and ensure that assessors make use of these as a learner before commencing delivery to apprentices."

Louise Preston, head of the skills for life hub at Havering College: "Initially assess thoroughly to make sure that learners are able to achieve at the level required for their framework. Be aware that functional skills are higher level and harder to achieve than a key skill at the same level!"

Helena Baxter, owner of HP Consultancy and Training: "Keep an open mind and stay positive - work in partnership with foundation learning providers who have been delivering functional skills for over a year."

Mel Hargreaves, programme manager at Collyers: "Embed it as much as possible. Get good diagnostic testing procedures."

Seamless Functional Skills

SQA + Tribal



SQA and Tribal are working in partnership to offer learners a seamless journey through Functional Skills.

SQA offers Functional Skills in English, Maths and ICT, supported by SQA SOLAR online assessment.

Tribal's rigorous online assessment in English and Maths identifies and addresses individual needs at the start of the learner journey and supports through e-learning resources and tools.

Learner Journey

Screener	Initial Assessments for underpinning & Functional Skills	Learning	Formative Assessments	Summative Assessments
Establishes English and Mathematics need	Places learner on right level of course and generates an appropriate learning plan	Extensive selection of interactive learning materials ranging from Entry Level to Level 2	Includes practice tasks for Functional Skills and 'testlets' for underpinning skills	Offers links to SQA's online assessment resources

Together, we are an experienced international awarding organisation and one of the country's leading providers of applied technology and professional support services to the learning and skills sector.

For more information please speak to either the SQA or Tribal business development teams



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