

FUNCTIONAL **SKILLS** **CURRICULUM** **GUIDE**

FUNCTIONAL SKILLS ENGLISH, MATHS AND ICT

**THIS CURRICULUM GUIDE IS DESIGNED TO HELP
CURRICULUM DESIGNERS PLAN DELIVERY OF
THE OCR FUNCTIONAL SKILLS QUALIFICATIONS.**

**SKILLS AND
EMPLOYABILITY**

OCR 

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**THESE QUALIFICATIONS WILL
ENCOURAGE LEARNERS TO
DEVELOP THEIR ENGLISH,
MATHS OR ICT SKILLS AND
TRANSFER SKILLS IN WAYS
THAT ARE APPROPRIATE TO
THEIR SITUATION**

1 INTRODUCTION

This Curriculum Guide has been designed to assist centres with the delivery and assessment of the OCR Functional Skills qualification.

The guide is designed to give centres a useful starting point when planning for the delivery of functional skills, using real centre examples and guidance based on their own experiences. Core support material is also provided in addition to this guide and the specification, which gives ideas and guidance for Teaching and Learning. Enhanced support provided by key subject organisations also helps teachers further explore innovative ways of teaching and learning for functional skills. All of the above resources are free to download from the OCR website.

It is important to make the point that the guide plays a secondary role to the specification itself. The specification is the document on which assessment is based and specifies what content and skills need to be covered in delivering the course. At all times, therefore, this guide should be read in conjunction with the specification. If clarification on a particular point is sought then that clarification should be found in the specification itself.

Teaching of this qualification will vary greatly from centre to centre and from teacher to teacher. With that in mind, this guide is offered as guidance but may be subject to modifications by the individual teacher.

1.1 WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE?

Whether you have been involved in a pilot or are new to functional skills, this guide will give you ideas and tips to get started.

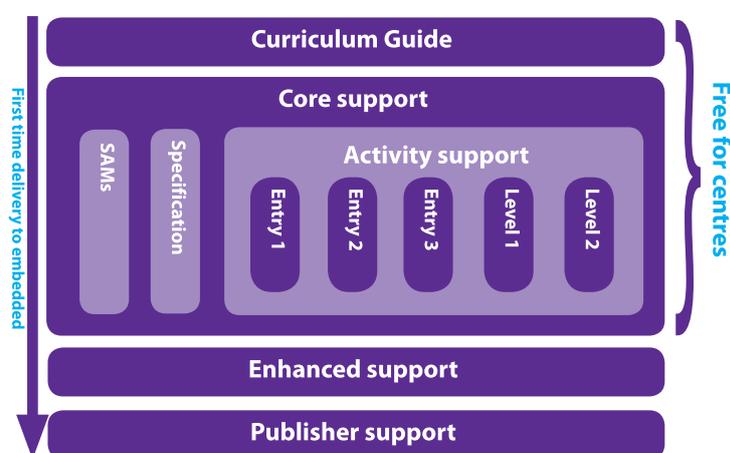
1.2 STRUCTURE AND APPROACH OF GUIDE

We have prepared this guide in a way that will allow you to be flexible in your approach to delivering functional skills. We recognise that different learners need different strategies for tackling functional skills and this guide has been structured to allow you to do this. Our model shows you several ways to access the content, all of which is designed to get you started in delivering functional skills.

1.3 HOW THIS GUIDE FITS WITH OTHER OCR SUPPORT

This curriculum guide is designed as a starting point for planning functional skills delivery, and is part of a linked package of support that helps get you from preparation to delivery.

The guide gives ideas and approaches to delivery, together with common pitfalls experienced by pilot centres. It draws on experiences from a centre perspective, and highlights key issues to consider before planning delivery. In addition to this guide, there is a comprehensive package of support that follows – this is indicated in the diagram below.



1.4 OVERVIEW OF FUNCTIONAL SKILLS

Functional skills are practical skills in English, Maths and Information Communication Technology (ICT) that allow individuals to work confidently, effectively and independently in life.

OCR functional skills qualifications are offered at Entry Level, Level 1 and Level 2 and meet the functional skills criteria approved by Ofqual.

OCR Entry Level Functional Skills assessments are based primarily on task-based scenarios with a limited duration and must be undertaken under controlled assessment conditions. The assessments use and reinforce skills-based, problem-solving learning techniques. OCR Level 1 and 2 functional skills qualifications in English, Maths and ICT are designed to develop and assess Functional Skills as determined by a set of skills criteria. At Level 1 and Level 2, assessments are exam – based. There is more information on assessment in section 3.

2 ETHOS AND ASPIRATIONS

2.1 THE OCR FUNCTIONAL SKILLS VISION

Functional skills matter. They will provide learners with the problem solving skills they require in the broader context of work and everyday life. By successfully achieving their functional skills learners will be able to demonstrate to employers and Higher Education that they:

- Are able to apply knowledge and skills and respond appropriately to all sorts of real-life contexts
- have the mental agility to take on challenges in a range of new and often unforeseen settings
- are able to independently work out what to do
- recognise and expect that tasks may require persistence, thoughtfulness, struggle and reflection.

Assessment is critical to the value that employers, learners and others will place on functional skills achievement.

This requires assessments to be based on real life, task based activity, rather than a solely objective test

OCR believes that functional skills will give pupils a practical grounding in how to apply skills to everyday situations, with a strong focus on explanation and problem-solving, rather than abstract concepts and recall. Our assessments reflect this belief, using real-life contexts that allow learners to apply their skills in a variety of situations.

This experience, backed up by extensive research and evaluation, gives us a unique perspective and insight into what functionality means to assessment design.

We believe that a functional skills assessment should not be a tick-box test that measures recall of knowledge, but should be an assessment that gives learners the opportunity to demonstrate independence and problem-solving skills. Teaching applied skills needs different approaches, which shows learners how to cope with real life problems that they are likely to face in the future.

“THE ASSESSMENT APPROACH MUST ALLOW LEARNERS THE OPPORTUNITY TO DEMONSTRATE THE ABILITY TO APPLY KNOWLEDGE AND WORK INDEPENDENTLY TO RESOLVE PROBLEMS”

3 PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF FUNCTIONAL SKILLS – CASE STUDIES

3.1 CASE STUDY 1 DELIVERING FUNCTIONAL SKILLS WITHIN A FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGE: BIRMINGHAM METROPOLITAN COLLEGE

CENTRE BACKGROUND

In September 2009, having worked in close partnership for approximately two years, Sutton Coldfield College and Matthew Boulton College merged and became Birmingham Metropolitan College. Sutton Coldfield College had previously joined forces with North Birmingham College in 2003 and Josiah Mason College in 2006. The organisation is now one of the largest colleges in the UK with approximately 8500 14 – 19 learners and an extensive adult and apprenticeship programme.

In 2003, Sutton Coldfield College had a dedicated Key Skills area, the size of six classrooms and there was a centralised approach to KS delivery with a dedicated administrator. Following the merger with Matthew Boulton College, a full re-structure took place and the ownership of Key Skills was moved to Directorates.

Harmonising different approaches following mergers does cause a number of challenges and the organisation is dealing with these in a number of ways. Sutton became involved in the functional skills pilot in 2007 where the focus was on delivering all three skills to two BTEC 1st Diploma Engineering groups. In 2008, Sutton delivered all functional skills at Levels one and two to approximately 200 learners whilst Matthew Boulton delivered Functional Skills Maths to one vocational business group.

There were different views regarding the extent of the involvement in the pilot for the 2009 – 2010 Academic Year, with some managers wanting to switch all new learners to functional skills whilst others preferred to remain with Key Skills until September 2010. It was decided that each Directorate would choose which they wished to do which has meant that the college has been able to develop teaching skills for functionality in some areas whilst still having a considerable number of Key Skill assessment and portfolio entries running. The disadvantage is that this causes considerable demands on the administrative staff; the advantage is that the substantial involvement in the functional skills pilot has resulted in many lessons being learnt and the development of good practice which can now be shared across the college.

REASONS FOR GETTING INVOLVED IN THE FUNCTIONAL SKILLS PILOT

In 2007, (it was a condition of the successful Gateway bid that the college would sign up to the functional skills pilot) the Key Skills team responded enthusiastically to the introduction of functional skills and could clearly see the benefits for the learners. 14 members of staff volunteered to take the assessments themselves in order to more fully understand the demands of the tests and to help inform their teaching.

TEACHING AND LEARNING SUPPORT

Throughout the pilot, training was offered to staff and a range of supportive resources were available within the Key Skills Centre and on a Moodle Site. More recently, with the expansion of the pilot and in preparation for September 2010, a series of in-house training sessions on each of the functional skills were organised at the two largest campuses during June and July 2009. These were well attended, with positive staff feedback. Generic sessions were also delivered to Directorates as requested to enable staff to build in opportunities to develop functionality within schemes of work and lesson plans.

During the 2009 autumn term, awarding bodies were invited to deliver subject specific training at Entry Level and Levels 1 and 2 for all Functional Skills. Generic sessions were delivered to Directorates during a Staff development Day in February 2010 with other training delivered as requested. Staff feel that they have been provided with many opportunities to become fully aware of the functional skills requirements, although for some there is still the fear of something new as well as other pressing demands on their time.

“Functional” contains the word “fun” and there is a lot of scope within the specifications to make the lessons enjoyable and worthwhile. After staff requests for centralised resources, the college has recently set up a functional skills area on our intranet - SharePoint - although this is still in the developmental stage. The FSSP Teaching and Learning functional skills booklets do

“WE HAVE BEEN AT THE FOREFRONT OF DEVELOPMENTS IN FUNCTIONAL SKILLS ASSESSMENTS, INFLUENCING REGULATORY DECISIONS AND TAKING THE LEAD IN TERMS OF TRULY FUNCTIONAL ASSESSMENT”

provide excellent resources which can be adapted to suit different vocational areas. A generic scheme of work for Functional Skills Maths was distributed in September 2009 with staff asked to adapt this to suit the particular needs of their learners. A six week exemplar scheme for English and ICT was made available to help staff develop this further for themselves as appropriate to their learners' individual requirements.

The best resources developed within the college are where staff have been able to work as a team, sharing ideas and materials. Some excellent practice and innovative teaching strategies are being used within the college and the challenge now is to find the best way of sharing this across all areas. Time is an issue as always but the summer period offers an opportunity to collate and cascade.

EMBEDDING

Discrete classes are delivered for individual skills but a clear message has been given out that functional skills must underpin all curriculum areas. It is felt that the word 'embed' can cause problems as this can often be an excuse for ignoring something. As a result, we prefer to use the words 'developed' and 'applied' when wanting to see evidence of 'functionality' within all classes. It has also been realised that reference to functional skills needs to be within lesson plans rather than just schemes of work if there is to be effective delivery.

Although some curriculum areas are planning to fully 'embed' a particular skill within their curriculum during 2010 – 2011, they are aware of the need to recognise the 'spiky profile' of the learners and the requirement to develop the underpinning skills set. This is particularly important for the Diplomas where it is necessary to pass the skills at the appropriate level to get the qualification and, within this area, it is recognised that discrete delivery and support may be required for some learners.

STANDARDISATION

One of the Heads of School for the Quality department has a responsibility for the quality of Key and functional skills delivery and there are named Managers within Directorates to co-ordinate the provision. Lesson observations are used to measure teaching performance and as a means of 'standardising' the English Speaking and Listening elements. Entry Level assessments are being taken this year and, with relatively low numbers, a session will be organised for internal verification prior to sending these to the awarding body.

A considerable amount of planning is now taking place for the next academic year when the numbers of functional skills learners will increase significantly. To ensure the overall quality of delivery and assessment, it is intended to monitor and oversee the provision across the whole college on a regular basis.

PROBLEMS, ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

- **Levels** – Other than in the Diplomas, where the learners have to achieve at a certain level, most groups have learners who need an individualised programme for functional skills. Experienced, flexible staff are usually able to teach groups containing a mixture of levels without affecting the quality but this can prove a challenge for some inexperienced staff. Good initial assessment and continuous monitoring allows learners to achieve functional skills at a level which will stretch and challenge. Some staff have chosen to put all learners through the lower level earlier in the year and re-enter some for the higher level later, whilst continuing to develop skills in the rest.
- **Staffing** – An English, ICT or Maths subject expert is not always the most suitable person to deliver functional skills. The teaching skill required is to be able to develop thinking and problem solving skills as well as the technical knowledge and to encourage the use of these skills in a range of contexts. Functional skills teachers need to be identified at an early stage in the planning of the academic year. Teaching functional skills cannot be seen as a 'fill-in' for someone who is low on timetabled hours.
- **Accommodation / Rooming** – There is usually a problem in any busy college in finding enough suitable rooms for skills delivery. ICT provision is the biggest challenge. It is often not possible to fulfil the government's recommendations that all of our 16 – 19 learners take the stand alone functional skills assessments, although it is possible to ensure that all learners have the opportunity to develop their skills. With the exception of Foundation and Diploma learners, it has been decided to focus on those who do not have a Level 2 qualification when they join the college. Some vocational areas are making their own decisions about what provision to make to suit learners in their area but the intention is still to provide opportunities for all learners to gain a Level 2 qualification in English, Maths and ICT.

- **Time** – The problem of devoting enough time to planning and developing resources does not go away. Once done, however, much time can be saved and the quality of teaching and learning will improve. Various organisations are now producing functional skills resources and use can be made of the functional skills Support Programme.
- **Attitudes** – A small number of staff may see functional skills as just another government initiative and not recognise how the development of these skills will improve performance in all curriculum areas and the life chances of learners. The best solution is to constantly reinforce the reasons for the introduction of these qualifications (the needs of the economy and demands from employers in particular) and to show how easy it can be to introduce these ‘thinking skills’ into classes. Lesson observations which include commentary on functional skills are a good way forward, along with support and centralised resource bases.
- **Assessments** – The assessments are demanding and need careful preparation and practice. Learners may have the skill level but lack the ability to apply this to a range of situations. This is why it is important for ‘functionality’ to be developed across the curriculum.
- **Logical puzzle** – A group discussion which involves solving a logical puzzle
- **Games** such as Countdown, Scattegories etc
- **Competitions** such as designing posters using ICT with the group of learners selecting the winner based on a set of criteria devised by the learners themselves.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR APPLYING FUNCTIONAL SKILLS WITHIN THE CURRICULUM

Discussing – most classes include discussion work. Expand this by asking at the start what students want to get out of the discussion and getting them to reflect on their performance at the end. Ask them when they may need discussion skills in the future.

Written presentation – you may have a set format that you want information presented in but you could still ask the group what they think would be the best way. Get them to think about a range of audiences and why one format might be better than another. What software might they use to help?

Researching – Don’t just send off to research. Discuss the methods. Ask where they think they might be able to find the information. If internet research, get them to come up with different search criteria. Encourage them to come up with different and original ways of gathering information eg asking questions on ‘face book’ etc. Encourage them to consider how reliable sources are and whether they contain bias.

Graphs, charts etc. – If they are analysing data, discuss different ways of displaying and why one way might be better than another for different audiences.

Spelling – throw in the odd spelling quiz on technical words. Mention techniques for remembering words and breaking into syllables.

Spot the error – pieces of writing with deliberate errors. This can be a fun exercise whilst helping to reinforce and assess.

Showing working – wherever possible, get students to show how they have worked something out mathematically, logically etc. This could be a group task where they record the steps they take.

Presentations – many areas use student presentations as a different way of covering areas of the syllabus. This can be group work or individual. If doing this, make sure there is an input on presentation skills first along with evaluation of the performance afterwards. Don’t let students ‘read’ from a script.

GENERAL ADVICE

- Raise awareness of the value of functional skills across the whole organisation (staff and learners)
- Carefully plan the delivery method considering the learner requirements, the strengths of deliverers and room availability.
- Encourage staff to volunteer to take the qualifications
- Set up a central resource base which can be easily accessed by all staff
- Ensure ‘functionality’ is a part of lesson plans and schemes of work, and ensure observers are trained to give feedback.
- Make use of the external help and support that is available.
- Remember ‘fun’ in ‘functional’.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Simple short exercises can be an excellent way of bringing in functional skills development into lessons without being boring. Here are a few that learners have said they really enjoyed:

- **Paired spelling quiz** – A short spelling test given each lesson. Learners work in pairs and a running total is kept. Certain words can be given more than once. A small prize could be given at the end of each term.

FUNCTIONAL SKILLS – STAFF FEEDBACK

I've only taught the Functional Skills English this year. Levels of attendance have been good and student responses have been reasonably positive with one student completing the Level 1 by March and wanting to get the Level 2 by June.

Initial assessment was very important and I found it useful to have the students sit a Level 1 paper as assessment. Those who flew through it coupled with previous qualifications were pushed to gain the Level 2. Those who struggled more stuck with Level 1 again in conjunction with previous skills.

Doing discussion work first allows the groups to bond and informal assessment to take place before seeking to develop more specific verbal communication skills. Presentation skills are also good to develop even for Level 1 students who do not have to do it as an assessment.

Written practice for the assessment focused on report, letter and article writing. This took in different styles of language, layout etc as well as grammar spelling and punctuation. These latter skills benefit if they are included every week as part of brief starter activities.

Reading speed and accuracy is also something which students need to develop at Level 1 and 2. The Level 2 skills of synthesis, detection of bias, difference between fact and opinion also need to be drawn out. These prove to be quite tough for the level 2 exam.

It was useful to do a mock exam in December and base early March entries on this and again use past papers in the run up to the June sitting.

*A really useful website with loads of useful resources is:
<http://www.skillsworkshop.org/l2lit.htm>*

I taught Functional Skills ICT last year. We used the Level 1 assessment as a diagnostic tool.

Content needs to be taught in context using Word/Publisher, Excel and Access software. Learners will need to develop ICT knowledge around basic use of terminology and equipment, health and safety etc.

*Changes to the Level 2 ICT assessment have now made it more practical to do in the time set and again students need mocks to develop understanding of finding files, importing data and saving works and print screens. To develop Level 2 skills in an hour a week is quite intense but achievable. Useful resources can be found at
<http://www.teach-ict.com/>*

“Remember, Functionality is about acquiring skills and then applying them in a range of contexts. Provide every opportunity for students to use their skills. They won't want to bother so it is up to you to make them think and explain. Don't tell them what they need to do, get them to tell you!”

EXAMPLE FUNCTIONAL SKILLS ENGLISH SCHEME OF WORK

Embedded link to FE1/ FS English scheme of work

Example Functional Skills Maths Level 1 Scheme of Work

Embedded link to FE1/ FS maths level 1 Scheme of Work

Example Functional Skills Maths Level 2 Scheme of Work

Embedded link to FE1/ FS maths level 2 scheme of work

This year I was teaching a group for Functional Skills ICT (they were working with me at Level 1). It's been a very gratifying experience. We have had the opportunity to make sure that everybody has been learning about different areas of IT (whereas we felt that previously we were somehow constricted by the fact that we had to get the students to produce a portfolio for their Key Skills IT, and also pass a test to complete their qualification).

During the year we have looked at all types of different applications and tasks that can be done in IT, which are useful for things like applying for jobs (Word documents as in formal letters, CV writing, writing reports, etc), different tasks they might need doing at work (organising file systems, keeping records of customers, being aware of data protection, saving data in a responsible manner; also doing presentations; creating databases), we have learned about new technologies (Web 2.0, open source software) and how they can help us make our lives easier.

I believe my students have enjoyed the opportunity to take part in all these tasks. Also, they seemed to take really well to the idea of looking at exam practice and learning about the sort of question papers they would complete to get their functional skills qualification. Given that these assessments are not multiple choice, they get more of a chance to be creative on how to cope with questions, doing proper answers and so on.

I think they have understood the value of this new qualification and that they have been made more aware of the fact that IT, nowadays, is something we use as a tool in all walks of life.

Feedback about Functional Skills English:

I focussed a lot on the second half of the paper as the moderators' reports said that most of the failed students failed this part of the papers. Therefore, I did quite a lot of work on letter writing, writing reports, writing introductions and conclusions, writing articles and using information to write articles and reports.

Whilst they were writing I was correcting grammar, spelling etc and giving them individual work to focus on as well.

I also did different reading comprehensions with them to support the first half of the paper.

I did not do too much with them on the Speaking & Listening because I taught all of them for the English Speaking Board at Level 2 so had already covered a lot of work with them.

I also related a lot of the topics around their subject area which was Travel and Tourism so they had an interest.

3.2 CASE STUDY 2 DELIVERING FUNCTIONAL SKILLS WITHIN A FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGE: PETROC

CENTRE BACKGROUND

Petroc is a tertiary FE college based in Devon. In 2008 North Devon College merged with East Devon College to form Petroc which currently delivers courses to over 20,000 learners. In 2009/10, 130 staff were involved with delivering Key Skills to approximately 3500 learners on full time, part time and apprenticeship programmes, with a success rate of 75%. We are part of a consortium involved in delivering Diplomas in Creative and Media and Society, Health and Development.

In January 2007 we were invited to take part in trialling OCR's assessments in Functional Skills Maths, English and ICT. Knowing that Key Skills were going to be replaced by functional skills, we were very eager to be involved with the development of the programme from the beginning. 30 learners took part in the trials covering all three skills at level 1 and 2 with varying results but with the opportunity to feed back issues to OCR. We had a great team of staff delivering Key and Basic skills, all of whom needed professional development in order to deliver 'functionality' effectively. Our insight into how the new qualifications were assessed helped us to put together the staff development that was to follow.

In year 1 of the pilot with OCR, 12 key staff volunteered to take the assessment themselves and between us we sat 19 papers. This was a defining moment and really brought home the task ahead in developing the problem solving skills in our learners. This led to a comprehensive CPD programme with trainers from LSIS delivering some sessions in-house, whilst I attended every training event available and cascaded the information to senior vocational staff and practitioners. The CPD was based around two key themes; the difference between Key/Basic skills and functional skills, and the teaching and learning implications.

Every member of staff agreed it was a far more suitable qualification to address the needs of our learners but this was tempered by the realisation that many were unsure whether they had the expertise to deliver the skills required. The Key Skills structure I had developed included a co-ordinator in each of our five departments and the sections within those departments also had key staff responsible for overseeing specific areas of standardisation and quality assurance. This meant targeting the right people for the initial delivery was straightforward and it

was decided that we would trial functional skills with a few learners in each area in year two of the pilot with willing Key Skills practitioners.

Feedback was mixed – we quickly realised that many learners had been given very little tuition in problem solving and teaching this often started at a much lower level than that of the technical content. Also, we could initially assess and diagnose the technical ability but we had nothing in place to assess whether they could apply this knowledge. This is still an area we are developing and still have not found anything that can effectively assess problem solving skills.

Many learners took functional skills at a level below would have taken a Key Skills assessment at a particular level ended up on a level below for the functional skill. At Level 1 for example, learners had sufficient underpinning knowledge of key maths skills such as multiplication, but were unable to apply these skills in any other situation other than the one they learnt them in. In some cases of teaching Functional Skills Maths we found that 90% of teaching and learning had to focus on the problem solving skills using maths and not the key maths skills.

Throughout year 3 of the pilot, we increased our numbers of learners taking functional skills and also the number of staff delivering them. Mentors have been set up to support new tutors and every week I deliver a two hour session on a specific subject area – my work with OCR has given me invaluable experience in understanding how the teaching and learning needs to change to give learners the skills to achieve. As part of their CPD, staff are feeding back and sharing experiences – good and bad.

Our biggest priority is identifying the right subject level for each learner that will require stretch but with a good chance of success. Learner confidence needs to be developed before moving them out of their comfort zone. Styles of teaching are changing – much more emphasis is on practical and investigative tasks with just the right injection of new knowledge. The quote I use with all new staff now is:

Our biggest area of concern is within the work based courses, especially within apprenticeships where there is little room for negotiation on levels of functional skills required. Time for teaching, learning and practice of these skills is often very limited and I have done a lot of work in raising the issues to work based programme leaders so they can have strategies in place to support learners. I hope they work. Much of my time is now being spent with vocational teams, assessors and placement officers developing schemes of work which highlight where the functional skills occur, can be practiced, and then suggesting ways in which they can be developed out of context. It is important to identify areas where specialist Skills for Life staff can deliver the underpinning knowledge ready for the application in context, by the vocational tutor. This then helps learners to progress to the next stage and use their skills in complex unfamiliar settings.

It is getting easier as more staff contribute to the knowledge base and share ideas, and when a learner realises they can problem solve there is a clear improvement in other areas of learning. It's not so much learning, but learning to learn. And when a student realises they have the skills to work out how to tackle a problem they can't do, it is worth the hard work.

We now have in place a cross college quality assurance plan for functional skills which includes termly meetings for key staff for standardisation of Entry Level and English speaking and listening.

The CPD development plan includes staff wanting to deliver functional skills, holding or working towards a Level 3 subject specialist qualification.

“IT'S MORE LIKE A DETECTIVE MYSTERY – I GIVE THEM SOME CLUES, THEY USE THE CLUES AND WHAT THEY ALREADY KNOW TO SOLVE THE MYSTERY. SOME NEED MORE CLUES THAN OTHERS BUT I NEVER TELL THEM THE BUTLER DID IT, THEY TELL ME.”

RECOMMENDATIONS, BASED ON THE PAST THREE AND A HALF YEARS OF DELIVERY

- **Don't assume that a learner can use the underpinning knowledge they have.** We have used a comprehensive initial assessment and diagnostic system in the past which gave us the right level for a learner's development. What we have now developed is a series of short problems which assess a learner's use of the skills they have. It has become apparent that many young people have had little practice of how to apply their knowledge so don't be tempted to simply put them on the same level they would have been on in the past. Functional skills are more demanding.
- **Embedding is good practice, but practicing the skills out of context is essential.** Like many centres, we have spent many years embedding the Maths, English and ICT skills into our vocational programmes. Teaching the skills in a familiar context is still the best way to learn these skills. But to master them you have to be able to use them in a variety of situations. This means making the skills explicit and identifying them. A learner must understand the new skills they are learning in order to apply them to different situations.
- **Take the qualification yourself.** Of all the professional development I have delivered in our centre, the best way to learn what our learners need is to experience the assessment yourself. Everyone I know who has been through it has said it was invaluable.
- **Invest some time before the course to collaborate.** Our best results have come in programmes where the functional skills specialist and the vocational specialist work together to teach, learn and practice the skills needed for success. Borrowing off each others curriculum can enhance all programmes because once a learner has learnt how to solve a problem, that skill can be applied to every other course – and it is a valuable skill. This is not nearly as time consuming as it may at first appear because the rewards far outweigh the investment.
- **Less teaching, more learning.** Some of the best learning has taken place with the least teaching – guiding learners and giving them clues as to how to solve a problem is far more powerful than solving the problem for them. I use a quote when I deliver training sessions that sums up much of the lessons learnt over these last three and a half years:

3.3 CASE STUDY 3 DELIVERING FUNCTIONAL SKILLS WITHIN A COLLEGE: STOCKTON RIVERSIDE

CENTRE BACKGROUND

Stockton Riverside College is a college at the heart of the Tees Valley, providing dynamic and innovative learning opportunities to every learner. The college provides vocational education and training to around 15000 full and part-time students in any single academic year.

We have a dedicated team of management and staff, outstanding facilities and a proven track record in the delivery of vocational education. The college works constantly to provide an excellent standard of education, training and support to all its students to enable them to become effective learners and achieve their goals in life.

Stockton Riverside merged with Bede 6th form in 2008 so we now encompass 'A' level provision. The new, state of the art, Bede campus was opened in September 2009 with specialist sports and media facilities. Although we are all one college the 6th form brand has been retained.

We offer a broad curriculum that includes Performing Arts, Leisure & Tourism, Art & Design, Business Management, Technology, Health & Care, Humanities, and Continuing Education. The curriculum offers students enormous flexibility, not only in how they want to learn, but also when and where they want to.

Further information is available on the college website.

www.stockton.ac.uk

Functional skills underpinning knowledge is delivered in collaboration with a team of qualified literacy and numeracy specialists supported by course tutors and consolidation is through embedding throughout the main curriculum. Work is project orientated in cross curricular environment and is applied and embedded to support the principle learning. Other tasks use real life scenarios giving an opportunity to develop generic functionality rather than being vocationally orientated.

HISTORY OF DELIVERY AND REASONS FOR DELIVERING FUNCTIONAL SKILLS

The college has delivered Key Skills since implementation and we have been involved in functional skills pilots in association with OCR (Adult Pilot) and FSSP. The Skills for Life team within Stockton Riverside College are always looking to improve service and delivery. We felt that getting involved would give us the opportunity to voice our concerns and influence how this assessment would develop; making sure that it was suitable. It enabled us to have a balanced view of what was happening to the qualification structure and to be at the forefront of functional skills making sure we were prepared as a team and as a college.

Functional skills brings together the Key Skills and Skills for Life approaches and this new assessment tests the student's ability to apply their knowledge to a range of scenarios. It is more appropriate for adults than the current format and the feedback from those sitting the pilot exams have been very positive. Learners have commented that it *"Encourages them to think for themselves"* and that *"It is more focused on Maths and English that is used in everyday life"* which they find really useful.

“FUNCTIONAL SKILLS WILL HELP LEARNERS BECOME MORE CONFIDENT IN THEIR ABILITIES AND ENABLE TO THINK FOR THEMSELVES. THIS WILL HELP THEM TO PROGRESS SUCCESSFULLY ONTO BIGGER AND BETTER THINGS IN EDUCATION, WORK AND LIFE. IT WILL ENSURE THAT EMPLOYEES HAVE A HIGHER STANDARD OF TRANSFERABLE SKILLS LEADING TO A MORE RELIABLE AND EFFICIENT WORKFORCE.”

HOW WE HAVE STRUCTURED DELIVERY

As mentioned previously functional skills underpinning knowledge is delivered in collaboration with a team of qualified literacy and numeracy specialists supported by course tutors and consolidation is through embedding throughout the main curriculum.

Work for the pilot projects has been delivered in a similar vein to the Key Skills portfolio with students encouraged to undertake vocational and real life projects to apply the skills developed through principal learning.

Successes included:

- Embedded maths and English skills in communication module
- Mini enterprise module (developing a magazine)
- Developing a media product unit

PROBLEMS AND ISSUES

- Maths has been difficult to embed within the diploma and math tutors are trying to overcome difficulties with students who have high levels of math skills but poorer levels of English skills. This is a particular problem with students who speak English as a second language or have dyslexic tendencies.
- Functional skills requires the teaching of problem solving and mastery of tasks not just the knowledge of the subject. Modules need to be front loaded in order to develop these other skills.
- Planned delivery models of 2 days a week over 3 weeks will not work, we found delivery works better over a longer period or time with shorter sessions i.e. 18 weeks x 2 hour sessions
- Delivery of functional skills requires knowledge of diploma modules, assessment criteria in order to embed.

- Both maths and English exams contain a lot more writing and learners have struggled to complete the exam tasks in the given time.
- Functionality needs to be explicit from the outset and delivery works best when working with learners from the beginning of the course.
- Time issues: developing new schemes of work, lesson plans and resources as they need to be adapted and updated to allow for functionality in tasks and give learners more opportunity to work independently.
- Difficult to enthuse Skills for Life staff when no decision has been made as to if and when there will be a move toward Functional Maths and English.

EXAMPLE FUNCTIONAL SKILLS GENERIC SCHEME OF WORK

Embedded link to FE3/ functional skills generic 12 week scheme.

3.4 CASE STUDY 4 DELIVERING ICT FUNCTIONAL SKILLS WITHIN A SCHOOL

CENTRE BACKGROUND

The centre is a mixed, 11- 18 non-selective school. It is set in an authority that has a selection process at 11 due to the high number of grammar schools. The school was part of a consortium due to deliver the diploma the following academic year, hence the decision to become part of the pilot.

ICT is delivered as a discrete subject in both key stages with 1 hour a week timetabled time. Students have the option to choose additional ICT time in Key Stage 4 equivalent to GCSE guided learning hours.

All ICT classes are mixed ability. There are three members of staff that teach the ICT curriculum.

DECISION ONE – WHO TO CHOOSE?

There were originally 11 Awarding Organisations piloting functional skills so it was important that we researched the different offers, comparing assessment methods, assessment windows and assessment length. Another consideration was the guidance offered via websites and at the other end of the telephone. After extensive research, we chose OCR and approval was applied for.

DECISION TWO – WHO DO WE ENTER?

A centre decision was made that Year 9 students would be the cohort that the pilot would involve for ICT; Maths and English.

DECISION THREE – HOW ARE WE GOING TO COVER FUNCTIONAL SKILLS?

At this moment in time I did not want to rewrite schemes of work and add to the workload of the department. The new frameworks for ICT for both KS3 and 4 had functional skills embedded. The references to functional skills within this document enabled me to map what had been covered previously within the Key Stage 3 programme. I found that this process was not an onerous one rather than enlightening and encouraging that from a 'technical demand' skills point of view we were going on the right track. The glaring issue was 'complexity' 'familiarity' and 'independence' –what do these mean? And how do I ensure that the concept of 'functionality' was adopted. Our units of work were always set within a context and the year 9 programme consolidated the skills learnt previously to encourage students to plan, design, implement, and evaluate the ICT applications and processes used. At this point in time I felt that this was adequate preparation for the students to meet the familiarity requirement. We always try to promote independence and complexity

would be built into lesson plans to differentiate learners, so at this point in time no changes were made to how we delivered and what we taught.

The academic year began as normal with no mention to the students about functional skills. The focus remained as with any other year to ensure students progressed to achieve their target level for end of key stage.

DECISION FOUR – WHEN TO ASSESS FUNCTIONAL SKILLS - LOGISTICS

When were we going to assess? Were the whole year group going to be assessed?

When, was a decision that had to be made in conjunction with the Examinations Secretary due to the timing of other practical exams requiring the use of ICT. We decided to enter for the June assessment. Logistically we made a decision to enter two ICT classes – all our year 9 classes are mixed ability and had covered the same scheme of work – so one from each of the two members of staff were chosen. This meant 4 sessions, (2x2) on just one day rather than cause disruption for a whole week.

It was at this point in time (MARCH 2009) one off tasks were given to the students. These were made up from questions that had been taken from sample OCR papers available. A mixture of level 1 and 2 were set to assess the level of entry for the students. It became apparent that the application of ICT skills was not the only skill being tested but also literacy. This reinforced the decision that Level 1 would be the level that students would be entered for.

THE ASSESSMENT

Students were quite uncomfortable with the 12 page booklet that was full of written instructions. They were not used to sitting and completing ICT tasks in exam conditions that lasted an hour and a half.

This was something we had not prepared them for and something to action in the future.

ANALYSIS

Coverage of the skills standards had been covered. However it was the assessment process that caused issues for the students, particularly year 9s who were not experienced at sitting long tests. This was more so this year as SATs was now an optional choice by centres.

Perhaps the students could have been prepared for the assessment more fully by building up different mock

scenarios getting them used to eventually sitting an hour and a half mock. This creates timing issues which ICT does not have. Therefore, to implement successfully, models of delivery need to be reviewed as it cannot be delivered in an hour a week. This requires consultation with Senior Management regarding timing and also whether it should be delivered discretely. This is not an ICT department issue – it is a whole school issue.

Not all students should have been entered for Level 1 – perhaps they would have been better doing Entry Level 3 – therefore more differentiation of functional skills is required at Key Stage 3 for the less able. This also is the case for the more able however I would have doubts about the maturity of year 9 to cope with level 2 and be successful. This is where I regretted not really getting to grips with the differences between the levels and assessment methods. Time put in at the front-end of the process would have made it clear that really level 2 was definitely not suitable particularly as the preparation did not cover the complexity and independence required in any depth.

On comparison with KS3 data the results proved that students who were strong level 5+ in ICT and English performed well – passing level 1. Those that were level 5 in ICT did not all succeed and students who were level 4 did not achieve Level 1 Functional Skills. This reinforced the point about preparation as it requires the learner to be functional in their application of skills – it is not a test of what they can do but how they achieve a solution to a problem.

OUR PLANS FOR NEXT YEAR

Leave entry until year 11 and have a differentiated entry of Level 1 and Level 2 for all. This will provide a focus for the discrete ICT lessons in year 10. The benefit of having chosen OCR is that there are 5 windows of assessment to take advantage of, therefore due to other subject assessment pressures there is flexibility to sit in January or March rather than the traditional May/June peak time. This has been the most preferred option for the following academic year and the most cost effective.

KEY POINTS TO CONSIDER BEFORE PLANNING DELIVERY

- Be clear about what functional skills are. Look at the guidance amplification document alongside the sample materials prepared by the awarding bodies. Understand the differences between the levels of entry as far as Familiarity, Complexity, Technical demand and Independence is concerned.
- Look at what is already being covered by existing schemes of work – do not reinvent the wheel. For example our students cover spreadsheet skills – entering, editing data, appropriate use of formulae and functions etc. taught through a context to build up the skills. This fits with functional skills approach of familiarity and technical demand but independence and complexity needs to be more focused within the current schemes of work. Therefore rewording the tasks so that they are not as directed in what steps the students need to do. The students now plan what they are going to do and how for themselves – a process that over time becomes natural.
- Look at your students and determine what is best for them – level of entry; type and length of assessment and determine WHEN the assessment is likely to take place. This should help choose the appropriate awarding board. When deciding on the level of entry the major factor to consider is the differences between the different level assessment designs e.g. Complexity; Technical demand; Familiarity and Independence and the student attainment across these within ICT
- Emphasise the application and use of ICT wherever possible – links with other subjects areas could help reinforce this. PSHE and project based learning are curriculum areas where opportunities have arisen to deliver the application of ICT through problem solving contexts. For example in PSHE students were set a hypothesis statement to test that involved them carrying out primary and secondary research, collating data, presenting data and analysing their findings. They were asked to prepare a presentation to summarise the process to their teacher. They were given choice as to what software to use and the final form of presentation.
- Encourage students to use ICT as a tool to solve problems rather than complete ‘do’ tasks to demonstrate skills.
- Assessment practice is essential. Provide short timed scenarios that gradually build up over a period of time to prepare them to focus on task requirements. Vary the way in which problems are set – memo them, email them, write them a letter to help make it different from another task. Enable students to choose software to use to complete tasks rather than direct towards a spreadsheet or database as the solution is key to functional skills. As the assessment approaches set them a mock to get used to the timing and discipline of sitting for longer than they are used to.

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OCR Functional Skills ICT – Student Book
Steve Cushing, Ian Paget
ISBN: 9780340984345
Published: October 2010

OCR Functional Skills ICT – Dynamic Learning Resources
Steve Cushing, Ian Paget
Published: October 2010

OUP is the publisher partner for OCR Functional Skills English.



Functional English for OCR CD-ROM
Lorraine Wilson
ISBN: 9780199138838
Published: September 2010

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Published: October 2010

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Mark Patmore, Bob Hartman
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Mark Patmore, Bob Hartman
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Geoff Gibb, Steve Cavill
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