

Boosting Literacy and Numeracy Levels -

a bite-sized approach

learning your way

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Executive summary

This white paper outlines the problems with Adult Literacy and Numeracy levels in England. The recent OECD report placed England 22nd overall out of 24 participating countries for literacy and 21st for numeracy among the 16-24 age group¹.

The current Government approach is for all young people to achieve a GCSE at Grade C or above or Functional Skill at Level 2 as a minimum, but to enable learners to achieve this more is needed to support them than to simply require that they re-sit the exams until they pass.

Following the Wolf Report, the SFA announced it would fund a new set of English and Maths qualifications within the QCF to support learners' progression towards GCSE and Functional Skills.

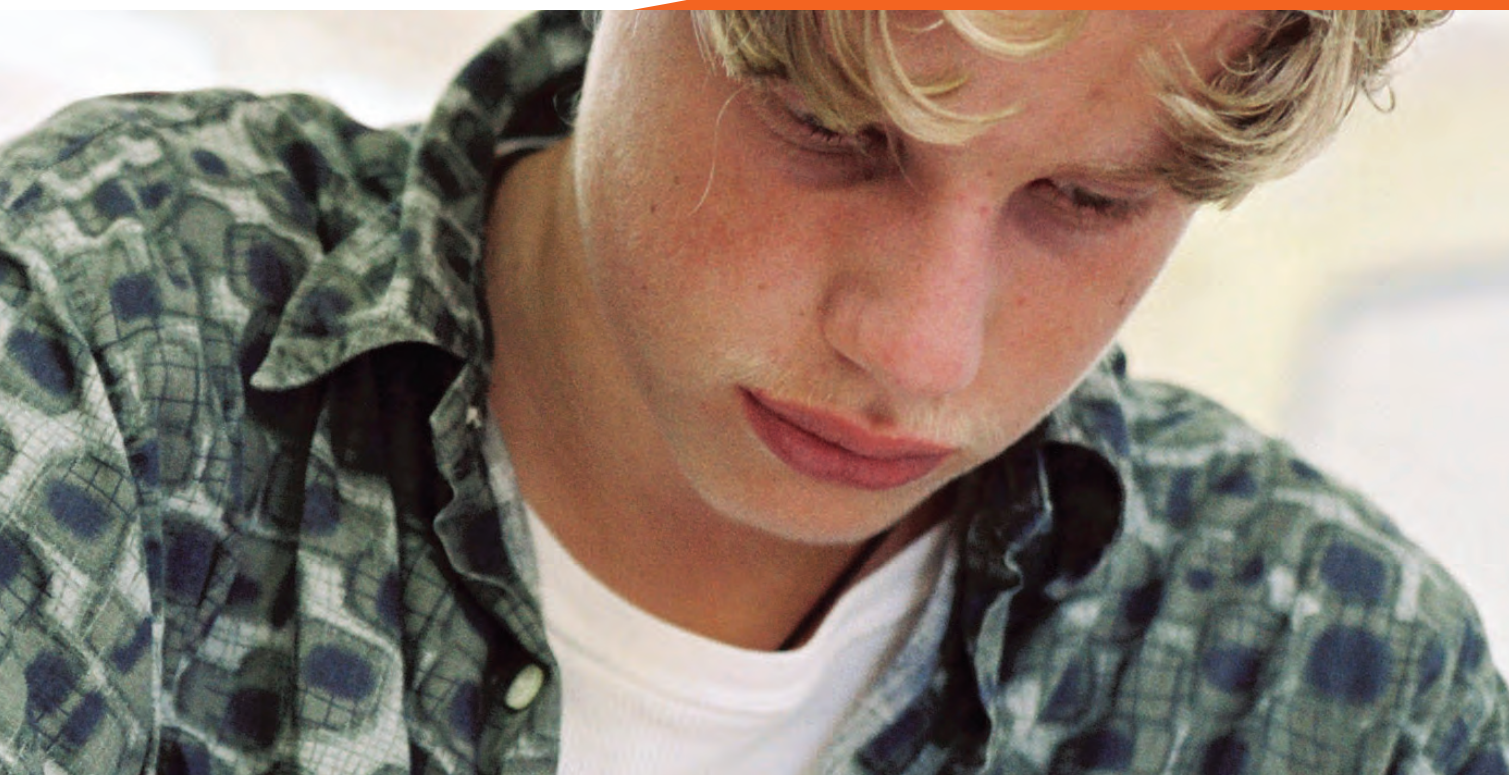
This white paper demonstrates that the key features you should look for when selecting such qualifications are:

- That they include small awards in specific areas of knowledge to allow targeting of areas of need.
- That content is not sub-divided into too small a chunks.
- That they support mixed ability teaching, with content similarly divided across levels.
- That they allow learners to progress towards a GCSE or Functional Skill.
- That they can be delivered as either discrete provision or embedded within other provision.
- That they provide assessment which is both flexible to learner needs and robust.
- That they provide credit accumulation to allow learners to gain a larger qualification which draws the individual bites together into a coherent whole.

When selecting an appropriate qualification to meet your learners' needs, this white paper also shows how the right qualification can be used:

- As a discrete course, either long and thin, or short and fat.
- To embed within other provision, running alongside your existing vocational or academic curriculum.
- To deliver short intensive packages of learning to quickly address specific skills gaps, particularly where those gaps are preventing a learner from gaining or progressing in employment.

¹ Source: Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) (2012).





Introduction

The latest study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), published in October showed that England and Northern Ireland have a higher than average proportion of adults with literacy and numeracy proficiency below level 2². The report also revealed that the situation amongst young people is even worse, with England ranked 22nd overall out of 24 participating countries for literacy and 21st for numeracy among the 16-24 age group.

The recognition of the need to improve our literacy and numeracy skills is not new, in response to the publication of the Wolf Review of Vocational Education³ and BIS's review of adult literacy and numeracy provision⁴, in February 2012, the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) announced that it would fund a new set of English and Maths qualifications within the QCF in order to support learners' progression towards GCSE English and Maths at A*-C or to a Level 2 Functional Skills qualification.

The SFA stated that from August 2012 funding would be available for qualifications that:

- Were sufficiently rigorous and flexible to support learner progression.
- Focused on the core English and mathematical skills needed to enable learners to progress towards achieving an A*-C GCSE or L2 Functional English and Maths qualification.
- Provided the necessary flexibility and responsiveness required by adult learners.
- Provided robust assessment of each of the skills areas covered in order to ensure rigour and to provide evidence of the skills gained.
- Reflected, in the learning outcomes and assessment criteria, the existing national literacy and numeracy standards.

When looking for suitable English and Maths qualifications to use with your learners you should evaluate the offer against these core principles, as well as the standard requirements of the QCF.

Providers welcomed this move as they had identified a need to use this type of English and Maths qualifications to address a number of key factors:

- A need for QCF English and Maths qualifications to fill the gap left since the closure of the test bank for adult basic skills qualifications, (including 16-19 providers planning to include the qualifications in study programmes, where English and Maths is a requirement for all learners who have not yet achieved a Level 2 and adult learning providers offering small packages of learning including for the unemployed).
- A desire to offer QCF English and Maths alongside employability and vocational qualifications at Entry and Levels 1 and 2.
- To enhance their portfolio in a flexible way which addresses learners' individual and varied needs, particularly in supporting learners on non-traditional learning pathways.

² Source: Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) (2012).

³ Review of Vocational Education – The Wolf Report, DfE (2011)

⁴ New Challenges, New Chances, Further Education and Skills System Reform Plan: Building a World Class Skills System BIS (2012)

Choosing the right qualification

The Development Process

When choosing a qualification to address this need, you should look for suites which have been developed closely with providers, using focus groups to identify what providers were looking for in terms of structure, size, approach to assessment and guidance material.

Key features that should be included:

- Simplicity and clarity in both structure and content.
- A need for flexibility so that the offer would meet the needs of different types of learners in different types of settings.
- Unit and award sizes that would attract sufficient levels of funding to be viable, for example of at least 2 credits.
- A responsive assessment approach allowing for assessment and awarding when needed.
- Assessment that would not present unnecessary barriers for learners.
- Assessment that facilitates the delivery of packages of learning that include employability and/or vocational units.



Assessment of the qualifications

Careful consideration should be given to the available methods of assessment, since these are qualifications designed to address the requirements of learners who have particular needs and, in many cases, have not responded well to traditional methods of assessment.

The ideal approach will combine a suite of English and Maths qualifications that are assessed through a portfolio of assessment and where assessment is available whenever the learner is ready. These two features will enable the suite of qualifications to be highly responsive, offering maximum flexibility for providers and personalisation for learners.

The lack of prescription in the evidence requirements and timings for assessments for the qualifications means that teachers can be very creative in their approach and, where appropriate, offer learners opportunities for self-direction and choice about the learning activities they undertake. This means that the qualifications can support a wide variety of teaching and learning approaches to meet the needs of different learner groups and to take account of different learning contexts.

Initial assessment of the learner

Providers will need rigorous approaches to initial assessment to identify those areas that a learner needs to work on and to gauge the level at which they are currently working and the level to which they should be aspiring. Providers will also need to consider the breadth of a learner's needs and the 'spikiness' of their profile to determine the size of qualification that would be most appropriate. Many providers already have robust diagnostic assessment approaches in place which will not need to change; however, given the bite-sized nature of the qualifications, they may have to use their findings slightly differently when considering which accreditation best meets their learners' needs.

How the qualifications are used - The Bite-sized Approach

The content of the literacy and numeracy standards should be broken down into small, coherent chunks of learning in order to enable learners to focus on specific areas of weakness and for providers to select the most appropriate level of qualification to match the learning need. For example a learner may present with needs relating to accuracy in written English and speaking out in front of an audience. Initial and/or diagnostic assessment may identify that the learner needs a programme of learning for their written English at E2 and spoken English at L1, accredited through E2 Write Accurately and L1 Engage in Discussion.

While some qualification suites sub-divide the content into even smaller chunks, for example to focus on just Spelling, the best suites will not do this for two main reasons:

- Reducing the content to discrete aspects of a skill can lead to very atomistic teaching and learning which does not help the learner see how they can use what they have learned in a wider context.
- The level of funding available for very low credit units or awards is so low that for many providers such small-sized accreditation will not be viable.

Learners can benefit from the bite-sized approach by being able to:

- Take just the 'bite' or 'bites' they need.
- Use credit accumulation to gain a larger qualification that draws the individual bites together into a coherent whole.

This means that, in Maths, for example, learners could combine individual units to achieve a Certificate, covering all the skill areas for Maths and including units at different levels. In English, learners could choose to complete a larger award in one of three areas, Reading, Writing or Speaking and Listening by combining the units (all at the same level) relating to that specific area, or by combining units at different levels to achieve a Certificate which covers all aspects of English.

When to use them - Provider use of English and Maths qualifications

The beauty of using a coherent suite of inter-linked bite-sized qualifications is that they naturally lend themselves to being used in a multitude of different ways to meet the specific needs of learners in a range of different situations. This is one reason why selecting the right suite of qualifications is important.

Although the best qualifications will be able to be tailored to your learners' needs, most providers are likely to make use of the units in three main ways:

- Discrete provision (where learners sign up to an English or Maths course).
- Embedded provision (where learners sign up for a longer, possibly vocational course, in which English and/or Maths is embedded).
- Packages of learning (in which learners sign up for or are referred to a course, e.g. by Jobcentre Plus (JCP), which explicitly covers a combination of different skills including English and/or Maths).

Discrete provision might take the form of 'long, thin' courses, with learners attending for a couple of hours a week over a period of months or 'short, fat' intensive courses where learners attend full-time for a shorter period.



Embedded provision can be of any length and over any period but the structure will typically be determined by the main learning aim which could be vocational or academic. The amount of English and/or Maths content embedded in a programme will vary according to learner need. For example, a learner on a Level 3 Construction course might be offered the chance to include a Level 2 Maths Award in Size, Shape and Measure while a learner taking an Entry 3 Skills for Business qualification might take an Entry 3 Certificate in English.

Packages of learning are typically short, intensive courses designed to quickly address specific skills gaps, particularly those which may be preventing a learner from gaining employment, moving jobs or being promoted. These might include a combination of English and/or Maths units, together with employability and/or sector-specific units, depending on the skills gaps identified and the learners' aspirations. In some cases, learners may have been mandated to attend this kind of course by JCP.

The structure of the qualifications chosen should support mixed ability or mixed level teaching, with the content similarly divided and organised into units within each level and awards being given the same or very similar titles across the levels. Assessment guidance should be provided to help teachers to understand the difference between the assessment evidence required at the different levels.

Progression

One of the key design principles demanded by the SFA was that the English and Maths qualifications promote progression to Level 2, either in the form of a GCSE A* - C or a Level 2 Functional Skill. The design of the bite-sized qualifications will allow learners to progress through a framework of English or Maths skills units and qualifications from Entry 1 to Level 2. They will have been designed to enable learners to take highly personalised progression routes through this framework, moving vertically and/or laterally as they progress. Because the units are credit-bearing and sit on the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) learners can study and complete units at their own pace, taking individual single unit award(s) or, if they so wish, accumulating credit from a number of different awards to count towards a larger qualification.

Such Maths and English qualifications are designed to allow learners to progress:

- Towards a GCSE.
- Towards a Level 1 or Level 2 Functional Skills qualification.
- To further study, e.g. to a vocational qualification.
- To an Apprenticeship programme.
- To, or within, employment.



An example of available suites

Maths

Qualifications have been developed by Gateway Qualifications at Entry 1, Entry 2, Entry 3, Level 1 and Level 2.

Single unit awards are available in five different areas of Maths at Entry Level and in seven different areas at Levels 1 and 2.

A certificate which embraces all of these areas is also available at each level. Each certificate allows for some of the credits to be at two levels above or below the level of the qualification (where these levels exist), e.g. Entry 3 allows for some achievement at E1, E2, Level 1 or Level 2, provided a minimum of 8 credits are at E3.

Summary of Maths offer (showing lateral and vertical progression)

Entry 1	Entry 2	Entry 3	Level 1	Level 2
Award in... adding and subtracting*	Award in... addition, subtracting and multiplication	Award in... making calculations	Award in... making calculations	Award in... making calculations
Award in... money and time	Award in... money, time and temperature	Award in... money, time and temperature	Award in... money, time and temperature	Award in... money, time and temperature
Award in... using and communicating data	Award in... using and communicating data	Award in... using and communicating data	Award in... using and communicating data	Award in... using and communicating data
Award in... using size, shape and space	Award in... using size, shape and measure	Award in... using size, shape and measure	Award in... using size, shape and space	Award in... using size, shape and space
Award in... using whole numbers	Award in... using whole numbers and fractions	Award in... using whole numbers, decimals, fractions and percentages	Award in... numbers, decimals, fractions and percentages	Award in... numbers, decimals, fractions and percentages
			Award in... numerical relationships, algebra and ratio	Award in... numerical relationships, algebra and ratio
			Award in... using probability	Award in... using probability
Certificate in Mathematics	Certificate in Mathematics	Certificate in Mathematics	Certificate in Mathematics	Certificate in Mathematics

*Full titles follow the format: Gateway Qualifications Entry Level Award in Mathematics – specific area, e.g. Money and Time (Entry sub-level). Abbreviated titles are used in the table for ease of reference.

English

Qualifications have been developed by Gateway
Qualifications at Entry 1, Entry 2, Entry 3, Level 1 and Level 2.

Single unit awards are available in seven different areas of English at each level.

Larger awards (6 credits) are also available at each level in Reading, Writing and Speaking and Listening. Each of these is made up from the related 2 (Reading, Writing) or 3 (Speaking and Listening) single unit awards at the level of the qualification.

An 18 credit certificate which embraces all of these areas is also available at each level. Each certificate allows for up to 6 of the credits to be at two levels above or below the level of the qualification (where these levels exist), e.g. Entry 3 allows for some achievement at E1, E2, Level 1 or Level 2, provided a minimum of 12 credits are at E3.

Summary of English offer (showing lateral and vertical progression)

Entry 1	Entry 2	Entry 3	Level 1	Level 2
Award in... Engage in discussion*	Award in... Engage in discussion	Award in... Engage in discussion	Award in... Engage in discussion	Award in... Engage in discussion
Award in... Listen and respond	Award in... Listen and respond	Award in... Listen and respond	Award in... Listen and respond	Award in... Listen and respond
Award in... Speak to communicate	Award in... Speak to communicate	Award in... Speak to communicate	Award in... Speak to communicate	Award in... Speak to communicate
Award in... Read for information	Award in... Read for information	Award in... Read for information	Award in... Read for information	Award in... Read for information
Award in... Read for purpose and meaning	Award in... Read for purpose and meaning	Award in... Read for purpose and meaning	Award in... Read for purpose and meaning	Award in... Read for purpose and meaning
Award in... Write accurately	Award in... Write accurately	Award in... Write accurately	Award in... Write accurately	Award in... Write accurately
Award in... Write to communicate	Award in... Write to communicate	Award in... Write to communicate	Award in... Write to communicate	Award in... Write to communicate
Award in... Speaking and Listening	Award in... Speaking and Listening	Award in... Speaking and Listening	Award in... Speaking and Listening	Award in... Speaking and Listening
Award in... Reading	Award in... Reading	Award in... Reading	Award in... Reading	Award in... Reading
Award in... Writing	Award in... Writing	Award in... Writing	Award in... Writing	Award in... Writing
Certificate in English	Certificate in English	Certificate in English	Certificate in English	Certificate in English

*Full titles follow the format: Gateway Qualifications Entry Level Award in English – specific area, e.g. Engage in discussion (Entry sub-level). Abbreviated titles are used in the table for ease of reference.



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