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Reading between the lines

English and maths
supplement November 2015



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There has never been more expectation on the sector to deliver high quality English and maths provision on a tight budget.

Providers may be facing unprecedented funding cuts, but they have to carry on teaching the subjects to all post-16 learners who failed to achieve a C-grade or above at GCSE.

Colleges and independent learning providers across the country have long been aware of the extra strain this placed on teaching and classroom resources, but the surge in learner numbers has now been confirmed through official statistics published since the end of summer.

It comes as FE providers are adjusting to the new

A closer look at English and maths

numerical GCSE grading system.

Meanwhile, the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) has announced plans for a consultation on how English and maths Functional Skills should be reformed, which will inform a wider review of the qualifications.

The expectation on the sector to cope with extra maths and English learners while helping to improve future provision deserves wider coverage — which is why *FE Week* has decided to devote a supplement to English and maths in 2015 and beyond.

Page three includes a story on the ETF review of functional skills.

Pages four and five show the results of an exclusive *FE Week* survey, looking at how successful or otherwise the 16 to 18 funding condition has been.

Following on from that, principal of Bedford College Ian Pryce explains in an expert piece on page six why he thinks diagnostic tests show it's harder than the government thinks for providers to get learners who previously failed to achieve a GCSE C-grade up to a good pass level.

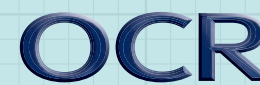
The supplement also includes editorial features

looking at take-up on maths and English teaching courses launched by the ETF on page 12 and how the numerical GCSE grading system will affect FE provision on page 15.

It also features expert pieces by leading sector thinkers including Harvey Young, chairman of the National Consortium of Colleges and Providers, Dr Nick Saville, director of research and thought leadership at Cambridge English, and Sue Southwood, ETF programme manager responsible for the reform programme.



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GEMMA GATHERCOLE

HEAD OF POLICY — FE AND FUNDING, OCR

LISTEN OUT FOR PERFECT STORM WARNING BELLS

In the education world, we like a good debate. However, there are very few debates about whether a learner having a good grasp of English and maths is a desirable outcome. English and maths have been proven to provide good positive impact on future learning and earnings potential.

But there are debates that we come back to — do we need a specific qualification level of English and maths or do we need functionally-literate and numerate individuals, are these questions the same or mutually exclusive?

In a recent survey of 500 employers we commissioned with charity Think Global, 94 per cent of respondents said literacy and numeracy skills were important (with 71 per cent saying very important). So these are questions that we need to address.

Schools understandably focus on GCSE achievement in English and maths and with the weighting these two subjects are given in performance tables; the focus on these subjects is more profound than ever. But there are some warning bells to be heard.

In describing the new reformed GCSEs in these subjects, ministers and Department for Education officials often call them 'more rigorous'. And with Education Secretary Nicky Morgan confirming a 'good pass' for the reformed GCSEs being a grade five in the new nine-one grading scale, the new maths and English GCSEs just got harder to pass [see page 15].

Only when the results of the first assessments are published will we start to get a true picture of this impact, but some crude estimations

have been made of how many people will fail to achieve that 'good pass' in summer 2017. These are somewhere in the region of 15 to 20 per cent.

While these figures may prove to be on the high side and with various support resources being made available to support the introduction of new GCSEs, it is still likely that there will be some turbulence in results.

It means that come autumn 2017, there are likely to be a greater number of 16-year-olds needing to continue with their English and maths studies. However, 'if you do what you've always done, then you get what you've always got'.

If a learner didn't get a 'good pass' at GCSE on the first attempt — and the only intervention they receive is the same style and format of teaching that didn't work for them before — it's unlikely they will progress.

It is a difficult ask taking young people who are probably disengaged from learning English and maths because they 'failed' at school and getting them to the level they need. And we know the policy seems to be ever-changing.

However, in the first year of the funding condition, the Education Funding Agency reported that 97 per cent of 16 to 19-year-

olds without GCSE A*-C English and/or maths attending an FE institution continued their study of these subjects. So despite a continuing reported shortage of English and maths teachers, evidence suggests that the sector is delivering.

In a few different places I've asked employers whether they use GCSE English and maths A*-C in their recruitment practices as a filtering tool. The most typical response is yes.

But when I ask a further question about the extent to which they know what's in the GCSE, very few have an understanding of the content.

You may have read an article from me before calling for an alternative adult GCSE. Our proposed alternative would support contextualised delivery and a contextualised approach is one we strongly advocate.

And perhaps the ability to contextualise delivery of English and maths would allow us to avoid that perfect storm.



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January launch for Functional Skills consultation

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A consultation on how English and maths Functional Skills should be reformed will be launched in January — as part of wider review plans that will lead to new qualifications being launched by September 2018.

A spokesperson for the Education and Training Foundation (ETF), which has been tasked by the government with reviewing Functional Skills, said the consultation will last at least 12 weeks and gather views from providers, employers, awarding organisations and other sector stakeholders.

He said the consultation responses will help inform a report set to be



Gill Clipson

published by the end of August next year, which will make recommendations for how the government should reform the qualifications.

Issues to be addressed, he added, included “the number of guided learning hours needed to successfully achieve Functional Skills for learners on technical and vocational programmes of study, including apprenticeships and traineeships”.

It will also look at how the new qualifications can better recognise the need to use English and maths in “a technology-rich environment” and test learners with special educational needs and disabilities, he added.

The spokesperson added that the review will draw up “an updated set of national adult literacy and numeracy standards [for adult literacy and numeracy qualifications]” by August 2016.

A spokesperson for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) said that the aim of the review would be to “improve the rigour of Functional Skills and ensure they are recognised and respected by employers” and the new qualifications would be “available during 2018”.

A steering body, for example including the Association of Colleges (AoC), the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, Hoxley, the Federation of Small

Businesses and the UK Commission for Employment & Skills, will also help oversee the process.

David Russell, ETF chief executive, said: “We’re delighted to be asked to lead this work through its next phase, having been closely involved since its beginning.

“With a million Functional Skills certificates issued each year, these qualifications must equip learners with the maths and English they need in a way that employers understand and trust.”

Gill Clipson, deputy chief executive of the AoC, said: “We are pleased to be working with the ETF to ensure that these improvements are made.

“The timing of this work takes on more importance as the review of technical and professional education has now been announced — it is vital that young people and adults are supported to develop and achieve the skills in literacy and numeracy that employers say they need.”

The BIS spokesperson declined to say how much funding ETF would be given to lead the review, adding that it would depend on upcoming Spending Review outcomes.

He confirmed that ETF was invited directly to lead the review and declined to

comment when asked by *FE Week* why no other organisation were invited to tender.

The ETF spokesperson told *FE Week* that it was “not aware what funding we will receive” for the review.

Skill Minister Nick Boles announced that the ETF had been asked to draw up a programme of reform for Functional

Skills qualifications in July.

It put the brakes on moves made by his predecessor, Matthew Hancock, to scrap Functional Skills entirely in favour of GCSEs.

In a letter to providers, Mr Boles said he was tasking the ETF with coming up with ideas to make

the qualifications a “well-respected and credible” alternative to GCSEs. It came after an ETF review of the qualifications led by former Jersey principal Professor Ed Sallis earlier this year found that the qualifications were “not broken, but could be improved”.

See page 12 for an expert piece on the review process by ETF programme manager responsible for the reform programme, Sue Southwood



David Russell

Up to 50k grants will boost maths collaboration

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The Department for Education (DfE) is offering short-term grants worth up to £50,000 to support “enhanced collaboration” between 16 to 19 providers looking to improve FE maths provision.

Bids for grants worth between £5,000 and £50,000 must be lodged by Thursday (November 19), with resulting contracts set to run from December 1 to the end of March.

A DfE spokesperson said: “These grants will provide funding to support enhanced collaboration between 16-19 providers (including [general] FE colleges, sixth form colleges, schools, academies, apprenticeship providers and independent providers) to secure improvement in the teaching of maths to 16-19 year olds in FE settings who do not hold A*-C GCSE maths.”

It comes after a funding rule brought in by the Government from 2014/15 obliged providers to ensure that 16 to 19-year-old learners without at least C-grade GCSE maths and English continued studying the subjects.

Guidance from DfE on the new grants said they

would go to institutions “committed to working with other providers to secure and sustain improvements in maths” that “propose suitable methods of facilitating this shared learning, so that less experienced institutions can benefit”.

All bids for grants from the fund, which totals £150,000, must involve at least two providers.

A DfE letter to providers explaining the bidding process said that Ofsted had continued “to report variable quality in English and maths provision across the FE sector” following introduction of the funding rule.

The government hoped, it added, that the grants would help improve maths provision, for example by supporting “the development of professional development networks for FE maths teachers”.

Applicants could also “learn from, and transfer proven approaches to teaching of maths from pre-16 and post-19 phases

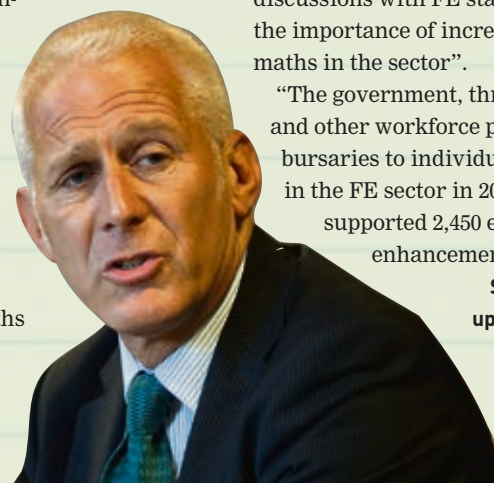
to benefit 16 to 19-year-olds in FE settings”, it added.

It comes after Shadow Skills Minister Gordon Marsden lodged a parliamentary written question on October 26 asking how many “teachers were employed in teaching maths subjects in the FE sector”.

Skills Minister Nick Boles said in his reply that the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills “does not hold this information”, but was holding “ongoing discussions with FE stakeholder organisations about the importance of increasing the number of teachers of maths in the sector”.

“The government, through its support of bursaries and other workforce programmes, provided 199 bursaries to individuals to become maths teachers in the FE sector in 2013/14 and 2014/15, and also supported 2,450 existing teachers to take maths enhancement programmes,” he added.

See page 12 for a report looking at uptake on courses geared at helping more FE tutors teach English and maths launched by the Education and Training Foundation.



SURVEY INDICATES FUNDING

Introduction

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Most respondents think that the maths and English funding condition is not a good policy, an exclusive *FE Week* survey of sector staff and governors has revealed.

The rule introduced last academic year stated that 16-18 students that did not have a grade C in English and maths and failed to enrol in the subjects would be removed in full from the 2016/17 funding allocation.

An exclusive *FE Week* survey, with staff and governors from more than 100 providers currently teaching over 40,000 maths and English learners, has demonstrated the huge challenge that implementing the condition has posed to the sector.

There were widespread calls among respondents for more funding to train and pay the wages of the thousands of extra maths and English teachers now required to teach extra learners that must continue with the subjects because of the condition.

Only 22 (20 per cent) out of 110 respondents thought that the policy was “good” or “very good”, with almost 20 per cent saying (17.3 per cent) it was “very bad” and the rest registering concern.

Moreover, when asked how challenging the condition had been — the most common answer, by 52 (48.2 per cent) of 110 respondents, was that it had been a “very big challenge”.

The Education Funding Agency said in September that the penalty for non-compliance with the condition would be halved — and even then it would only apply to providers where more than 5 per cent of relevant students (by value) did not comply with the funding condition, as reported in *FE Week*.

The condition of funding emerged from Professor Alison Wolf’s 2011 review of vocational education, in which she recommended that 16 to 18-year-olds who do not have at least C grade for English and maths should keep studying the subjects.

The recommendation was brought in as part of her study programmes package for 2013/14, and made a condition of funding the following year.

See below to read a number of comments made through the survey and illustrations showing proportions of answers to questions.

What have been the main challenges last year and this year?

Beverley Fox, director of learning at Huntingdonshire Regional College, said:

“Having access to good and true data of the students’ situation. Students not being capable of working at the level we ‘have’ to put them on (specifically for GCSE).”

Daniel Stanbra, head of curriculum area English, maths & flexible provision at Dearne Valley College, South Yorkshire, said:

“The mandatory requirements in funding compliance for English and Maths. There is often a significant disparity between previous achievement at school and actual assessed level, with the English & Maths formal requirements for learners often unrealistic within an academic year.”

Pam Abbotson, head of academic and higher studies at Macclesfield College, said:

“Implementing a cross college timetable to ensure all students can attend English and maths and that class sizes economically viable whilst allowing the curriculum to timetable around their vocational needs.”

Andy Cole, principal of the College of North West London, said:

“Volumes, securing (and then keeping) staff appropriately qualified and able to engage/motivate learners let down by the academic qualification and school systems.”

Kim Caplin, vice principal at Westminster Kingsway College, said:

“Staffing (not enough staff), student enrolment and attendance, student motivation at GCSE, timetabling additional groups, cut to vocational courses to fund English and maths.”

David Gleed, principal of North Kent College, said:

“Logistics — ensuring that there are the right English and maths courses available at the right times, with viable group sizes, offering the right streaming opportunity to ensure each student is in the most appropriate group to maximise their chances of success.”

What is very good and/or bad about the policy? How could it be better?

Mandy Morris, director of maths and English at Redcar and Cleveland College, said:

“Tutors feel they have less autonomy regarding level setting. This could be alleviated by enabling learners to complete one subject per year.

“A student who has a D-grade in both maths and English will have to enrol for four sessions per week to meet the core condition of funding.”

Judith Layfield, director at Bishop Auckland College, County Durham, said:

“Insistence on grade C GCSE will ultimately devalue the grade C.

“That is the whole point of averages. Schools have taken some very cynical steps to get students A to C.

“Those who don’t have one now are just being made to repeatedly experience failure. In success rate terms, it will actually be easier to get a pass on the A to G scale of GCSE than to get low level students to pass functional.”

Barnabas Selman, head of English at Bournemouth and Poole College, said:

“It’s good in theory to encourage everyone to get the highest grade possible in English and Maths, but it doesn’t take into account of individual needs and preferences.

“For some students a level two Functional Skills is the most appropriate qualification. Colleges are best placed to make that decision. Also more funding and training was needed to get the right staff.”

Neil Carruthers, curriculum operations manager at Chesterfield College, said:

“The issue is not doing the English or maths, but the straight jacket of having to do GCSE with students who have clearly been coached up and have attained a D in school, but are really working at entry three and really working at the E/F boundary in reality.

“Maths and English should be studied in a form that is relevant to progression and skills that are needed in the workforce.”

Sharon Marriott, director of 14-19 at Bolton College, said:

“The aspiration is good. However, there needs to be a much higher level of investment and support into resourcing this.

“For example, this could be in staff continuing professional development, timeline for delivery (nine months where schools have failed over two years) developing a positive ethos for English and maths in the learner community, and supporting information for the planning of learning from schools.”

Simon Hinks, vice principal at Varndean College Brighton, said:

“I have no problem with the principal of having post-16 students working towards these qualifications, which are gateways to employment, further or higher education.

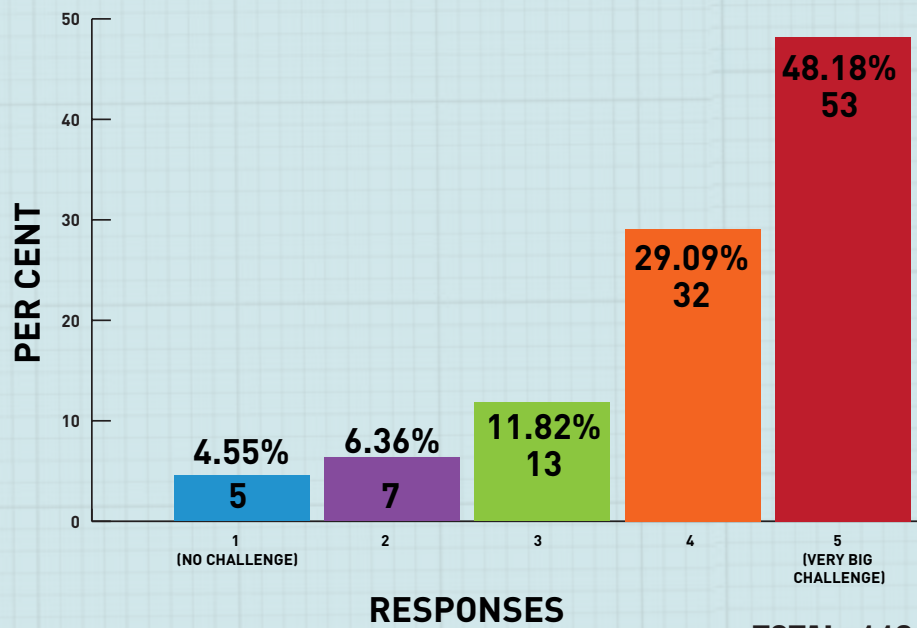
“We would like to be funded to do the work and we would like politicians and civil servants to realise that what seems simple to them can involve a great deal of complex management and administration at college level, at a time when we are expected to reduce staffing expenditure.”

A Department for Education spokesperson said: “Numeracy and literacy are fundamental skills. If young people have not mastered them by 16, it is more likely they will be held back for the rest of their life. That’s why we want all young people who do not achieve at least a GCSE C in English or maths to continue studying until they reach that standard. Post-16 schools and colleges are making very good progress in ensuring all young people have this opportunity.

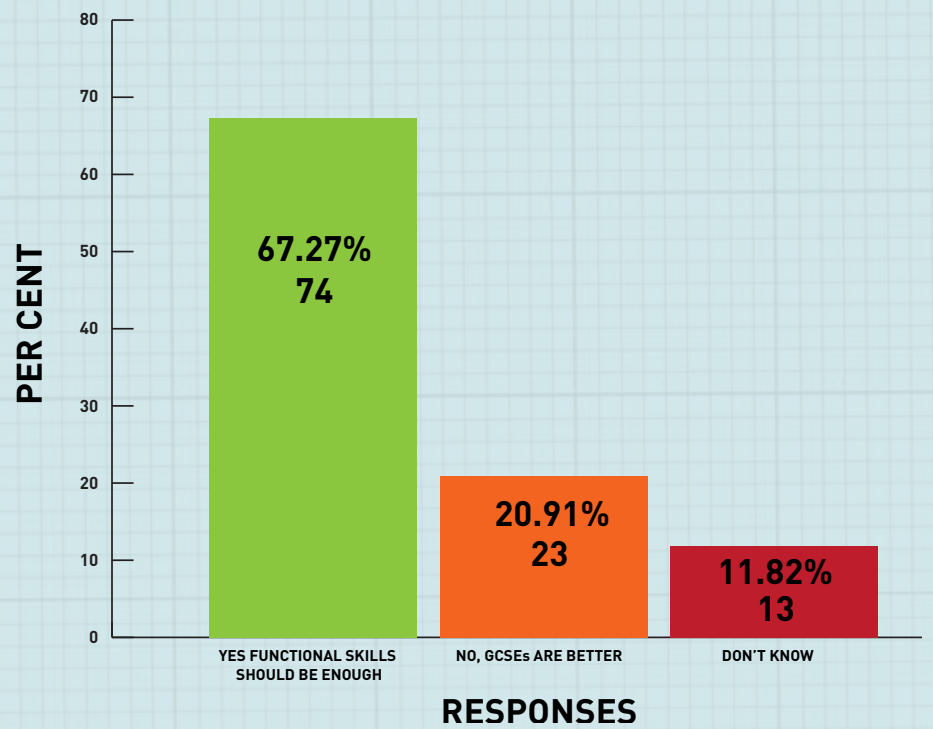
“Post-16 funding is already allocated on a per pupil basis, and we already provide an extra £480 per student, per subject for all those with GCSE English or maths below grade C.”

NG CONDITION CONCERN

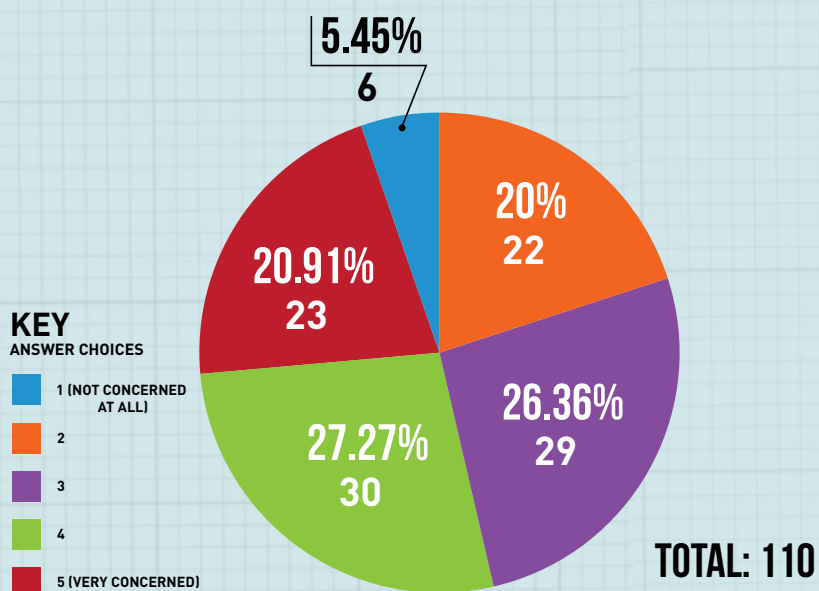
How challenging has the English and maths condition of funding policy been for the college (on a scale from 1 being no challenge to 5 being a very big challenge)



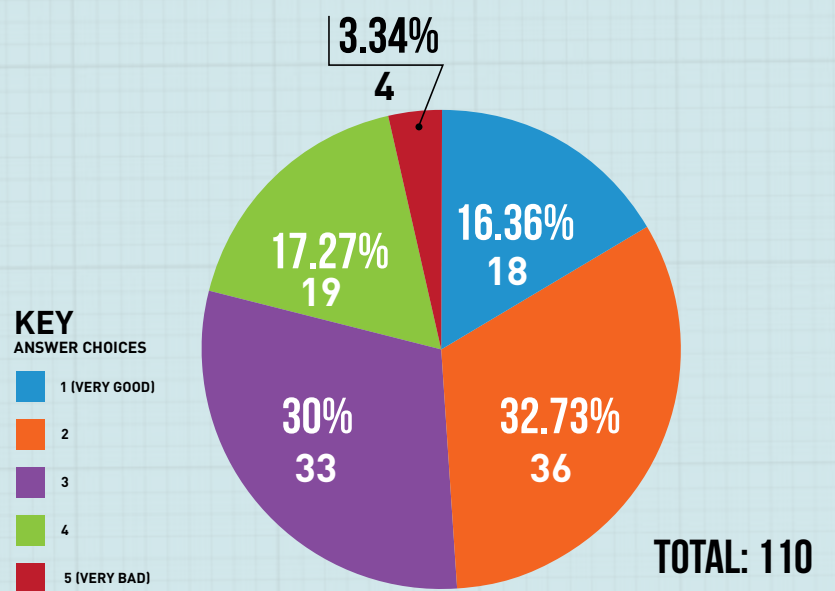
How good a policy is the English and maths condition of funding proving to be (on a scale from 1 being very good to 5 being very bad)



Are you concerned learners are being taught to pass the GCSE English and maths test rather than really understand the subject?



Should functional skills at level two be enough to meet the condition of funding, or are GCSEs better?





IAN PRYCE

BEDFORD COLLEGE PRINCIPAL

Diagnostic tests show funding condition is 'blunt instrument'

Diagnostic tests carried out in September on newly arrived learners at Bedford College, who completed their GCSEs at schools over the summer, indicate it will be more difficult to help learners facing maths and English resits to achieve a pass than the government might think, says Ian Pryce.

The basic premise behind the condition of funding around maths and English is straightforward and sensible.

Given the evidence that the magical grade C in both subjects gives you access to a better career, a better life and more money, surely no-one could argue that students who nearly achieved that standard should be required to try again — while those who did even worse should at least keep studying those subjects?

Let's be honest too. The condition was an

understandable response to evidence that, as a sector, we were not taking maths and English as seriously as we should.

The overwhelming majority of students in colleges were studying these subjects at level one, despite already having GCSE scores equivalent to that level.

However, the condition is a blunt instrument. It fails to take into account the actual level of skill many students possess, and implies grade C is the threshold to achieve.

Each year at Bedford College, we carry out diagnostic tests on our new student intake to determine their level of maths and English skills.

The software we use is reliable and helpful, yet it has always produced results that show students have weaker skills than might be expected, when set against local GCSE scores.

In recent years we have therefore

compared our results with student GCSE scores in those subjects. The results showed a neat relationship between GCSE grades and our test results — the lower your grade the less likely you are to test well.

That is reassuring. However, for maths in particular, the results showed the difficulties a college faces in raising attainment quickly.

We know from other research that student test performance in these subjects drops sharply between taking high-stakes summer exams and low-stakes autumn diagnostic tests, after they have started and been accepted into college.

One local head told me the drop was at least 20 per cent.

We know that school league tables make grade C a key target and huge effort is put into getting anyone with a realistic possibility of that grade up to that standard.

As a result, it is no surprise that, particularly in maths, our results showed that almost nobody below grade C is operating at level two.

In other words, local school teachers are clearly Jedi masters at ensuring anyone with a slim hope of a grade C achieves a grade C.

But therein lies a real issue. When 94 per cent of maths grade C students are not really maths-confident at that level, and 61 per cent of English grade C students are not really at that level either, there are real dangers in allowing them to feel they have "finished"

with those subjects.

Similarly, our results show the label "grade D" masks a huge range of ability levels.

Our data shows that very few of these students are operating at grade C/level two, so there are no easy wins for colleges.

Most are on one year level two programmes, which means we are under pressure to achieve grade improvements after perhaps 30 weeks of tuition.

A very significant proportion of D grade students show a reading age of about nine and a "maths age" of seven, so we are trying to mature people nine years in one.

The likelihood of the 52 per cent of grade D students testing only at entry level for maths, and 40 per cent for English, gaining grade C any time soon is very small.

Personally, given we have a good diagnostic tool, I would much prefer to prioritise first all those D-U grade students who test at level two and get them to good GCSE standard, and work on those tested at level one (whatever their GCSE grade).

It would be a better use of our expensive specialist GCSE teachers, truer to the aim of raising standards, and easy to evidence to a government understandably sceptical of our track record.

Ellen Jameson explains how Cambridge Mathematics is developing a new and more flexible approach to maths teaching

Further education is well aware that no single course of study fits all.

However, while this principle is reflected straightforwardly in the structure of school systems, it can be difficult to know whether it is also upheld in the finer-grained design of subject curricula.

In the case of mathematics education, there is a growing awareness that existing national maths curricula do not always meet the personal, societal and economic needs of all learners.

Not all learners will become mathematicians, but they will all have the opportunities and responsibilities of citizens.

Their education will need to do more than produce 'well educated deferential citizens', but a public able to engage critically and constructively with numerate argument.

Their ability to solve problems creatively will contribute to economic prosperity in the future.

Efforts to meet these goals face serious challenges. Teacher recruitment and retention is an international problem.

There is a disparity in uptake of post-16 maths around the world, with some nations, including the UK, producing a relatively high proportion of graduates who do not continue to study maths at any level beyond the age of 16.

Many jurisdictions with average or below-average performance on international



ELLEN JAMESON

CAMBRIDGE MATHEMATICS RESEARCH OFFICER

Help develop more flexible maths learning

comparisons of mathematical competence are still seeking to improve.

The consequences for failure in mathematics education can be severe.

In many countries, low numeracy is an especially strong predictor for long-term deprivation and the life chances for adults who operate below primary level mathematics are poor, according to a 2005 study by Samantha Parsons and John Bynner.

Last year, a team combining perspectives and expertise from four Cambridge University departments launched the Cambridge Mathematics project to address some of these challenges.

Cambridge Mathematics is a unified perspective on curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, based in research that aims to support increased curriculum coherence and finer differentiation through use as a guide and benchmark in jurisdictions worldwide.

Our hope is that this will enable students, educators, and curriculum designers to understand how connections in maths link

to the wider world and potential career paths, and adequately prepare students on all trajectories to engage with maths in suitable forms and levels in FE, no matter what path they take through the school system.

To this end, the Cambridge Mathematics team is beginning by developing a framework for learners age 5-19, in consultation with academics and education professionals and supported by a strong research base.

The Cambridge Mathematics Framework will then anchor and inform the development of paper and computer-based curriculum resources, a professional development framework, formative and summative assessments, and alignment of existing resources.

Our hope is that the framework can support a coherent curriculum within jurisdictions, yet also provide the flexibility each jurisdiction must have to tailor its own curriculum to its needs.

That flexibility will also help teachers to make use of tools and materials that already align well with their practice, while

providing a richer perspective on related concepts, skills, and approaches.

In order for the Cambridge Mathematics

Not all learners will become mathematicians, but they will all have the opportunities and responsibilities of citizens

program to meaningfully contribute to jurisdictions' efforts to prepare students to pursue maths in FE and to use maths in other subject areas, we will need to incorporate feedback from policy makers, education administrators, teachers/lecturers, and researchers in a variety of jurisdictions.

The process is ongoing, and feedback from those engaged in FE has been, and will continue to be, essential.

Cambridge Mathematics is a long term effort, and by 2020 we aim to have made considerable progress towards our goals.

It means that now is the time to get involved.

To view and join the conversation, you can visit our discussion page by clicking the Questions tab on the <http://cambridgemaths.org> website. To find out how to become more involved, click the Consultation tab.



DR NICK SAVILLE

DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH AND THOUGHT LEADERSHIP
AT CAMBRIDGE ENGLISH

Making a strong case for ESOL investment

The economic and social costs of cutting English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) funding could be disastrous, so it's important the sector presents a strong case to maintain and develop provision, says Dr Nick Saville

English is a skill for life — whether you are a newcomer from another country or native-born school leaver, it matters.

If your English isn't good enough, the personal and social impact can change the course of your life.

Provision of ESOL is one crucial element in this debate and is key to social integration for many long-term residents and new arrivals to the UK.

Learning English enables migrants to play an active role in the economy and helps them feel a part of the community they are living in. It can also help them become more independent and reduce operating costs for important provisions, such as social services. However, much of this relies on effective strategies for teaching English.

Provision of ESOL is, therefore, one of the most valuable services provided by the FE sector and has a powerful impact on individuals and society as a whole.

There have been increasing calls for volunteers to shoulder more of the burden of helping migrants to learn English.

These are often part of community based, neighbourhood or workplace schemes. The approaches are sometimes presented as an alternative to investment in formal teaching. Of course, volunteers and organisations in the charitable sector play a vital role and we see some extremely effective community support programmes.

Such activities should be commended, as they lead to positive outcomes in using the language for real-life communication.

For example, we know that regular informal conversations within a faith community, can give a huge boost to learners' communicative ability.

However, it is naïve to think that untrained teachers using self-accessed online resources can solve this problem alone. It's true even when the learners are well-educated, highly motivated and with some background knowledge of English.

Teaching provides the necessary support and feedback to ensure that the learning is as effective as possible and that learners are spending their limited time on useful pedagogic tasks.

Teaching is, of course, a specialist skill and English language teaching a specialism within it. Furthermore, teaching English to migrants presents a challenge, even for the

most experienced teachers.

We are lucky in the UK that we have an excellent ESOL teaching profession.

As education professionals, we must do more to increase awareness of the importance and benefits of specialised ESOL teaching

Organisations such as the National Association for Teaching English and Community Languages to Adults have played an invaluable role in developing practices that take account of the very different experiences that affect migrants.

But put simply, reducing investment in ESOL provision is a false economy and will impose long-term costs on services, as well as aggravating existing issues of social and economic isolation.

What is urgently needed in England above all, is a comprehensive strategy for English language teaching and learning.

Provision of ESOL needs to be seen within such a strategy to ensure that the funding reaches the right parts of the system and leads to positive effects and consequences for all stakeholders.

As education professionals, we must do more to increase awareness of the importance and benefits of specialised ESOL teaching. We need to demonstrate the value the sector delivers and to make the case for sustained investment more forcefully. It is where high quality language assessment for formative and summative purposes plays an important role.

Having an internationally recognised English language qualification brings significant benefits to the learner.

It opens up opportunities for them in the workplace, as it allows them to show prospective employers exactly what they can do in English. It's essential that good teaching and good testing work together to promote learning. Learning Oriented Assessment, for example, is a systemic approach to teaching and testing that establishes a baseline of skills and regularly monitors progress. In a time of austerity and cutbacks, justifying investment in ESOL is not going to be the easy option. But negative impacts of getting it wrong — both personal and social outweigh the cost.



HARVEY YOUNG

CHAIRMAN OF THE NATIONAL CONSORTIUM OF
COLLEGES AND PROVIDERS

Verbal commitment must be backed up by hard cash

The Government has so far failed to back-up the assertion that English and maths provision is one of its key priorities with funding to help providers deliver necessary improvements, claims Harvey Young

Amid all the commentary surrounding the target to create 3m new apprenticeships by 2020, the general public would be forgiven for missing that English and maths is also one of the Government's top priorities.

Indeed, this commitment has been clearly outlined in this year's funding letter by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) as well as the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) business plan — with both stating that English and maths “continue to be one of our highest priorities”. The commitment is to be warmly welcomed, particularly as it reflects supporting the core transferable skills that all businesses are keen to improve in their workforce.

However, while the rhetoric from the Government suggests English and maths should be prioritised in addition to apprenticeships, the reality, especially in terms of funding and mandated targets, is very different. With the FE sector already experiencing unprecedented budgetary pressures, coupled with the additional 3.9 per cent in-year funding cut to 19+ non-apprenticeship allocations, access to English and maths training, particularly for adults, has been severely restricted.

To compound matters, growth requests are being denied for English and maths, yet allowed for the Government's other two priorities, apprenticeships and traineeships.

With no targets or incentives for colleges and providers to provide English and maths training, the Government cannot realistically expect to see basic skills training improve in quality or quantity.

It comes at a time when businesses across the country are expressing enormous concern over the literacy and numeracy proficiency in their workforce.

The 2015 CBI/Pearson Education and Skills Survey found that over half of employers were aware of literacy and numeracy weaknesses among their employees. In addition, with a recent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report finding that England was 22nd for literacy and 21st for numeracy out of 24 developed countries, it is abundantly clear we need to concentrate on improving basic skills.

The National Consortium of Colleges and

Providers (NCCP) has been consistently raising the importance of English and maths to politicians and policy makers, but it is clear the Government will need to take more direct action in the sector to stem the decline of literacy and numeracy.

It is simply not enough for English and maths training to be incorporated into apprenticeship schemes, as it neglects the learners, largely adults, who do not need an apprenticeship but have a basic skills need.

If colleges and providers were to have in-year growth requests for English and maths, as with apprenticeships, or a mandated

The risk of having a surplus amount of unused levy funding, while provision for English and maths is cut further, is a perverse situation

target to spend a portion of the Adult Skills Budget on this essential training, then the Government would see the sector actively react to meet its stated priorities.

The Government's proposed apprenticeship levy has attracted a significant amount of criticism from the business world, particularly regarding the restrictions placed on them to spend their levy money solely on apprenticeships.

With estimates suggesting the revenue raised from the levy would match or even exceed the whole adult skills budget, there is a substantial case to be made to broaden this levy to encompass other training that employers' need, especially if they cannot provide for the amount of apprenticeships their levy affords.

It presents an opportunity to give employers the flexibility to choose the training that matters most to them.

The risk of having a surplus amount of unused levy funding, while provision for English and maths is cut further, is a perverse situation which everyone will want to avoid.

Ultimately, the Government will be judged on progress in meeting its stated priorities, but the status quo cannot remain for this to be said of English and maths.



OCR SUPPORTS

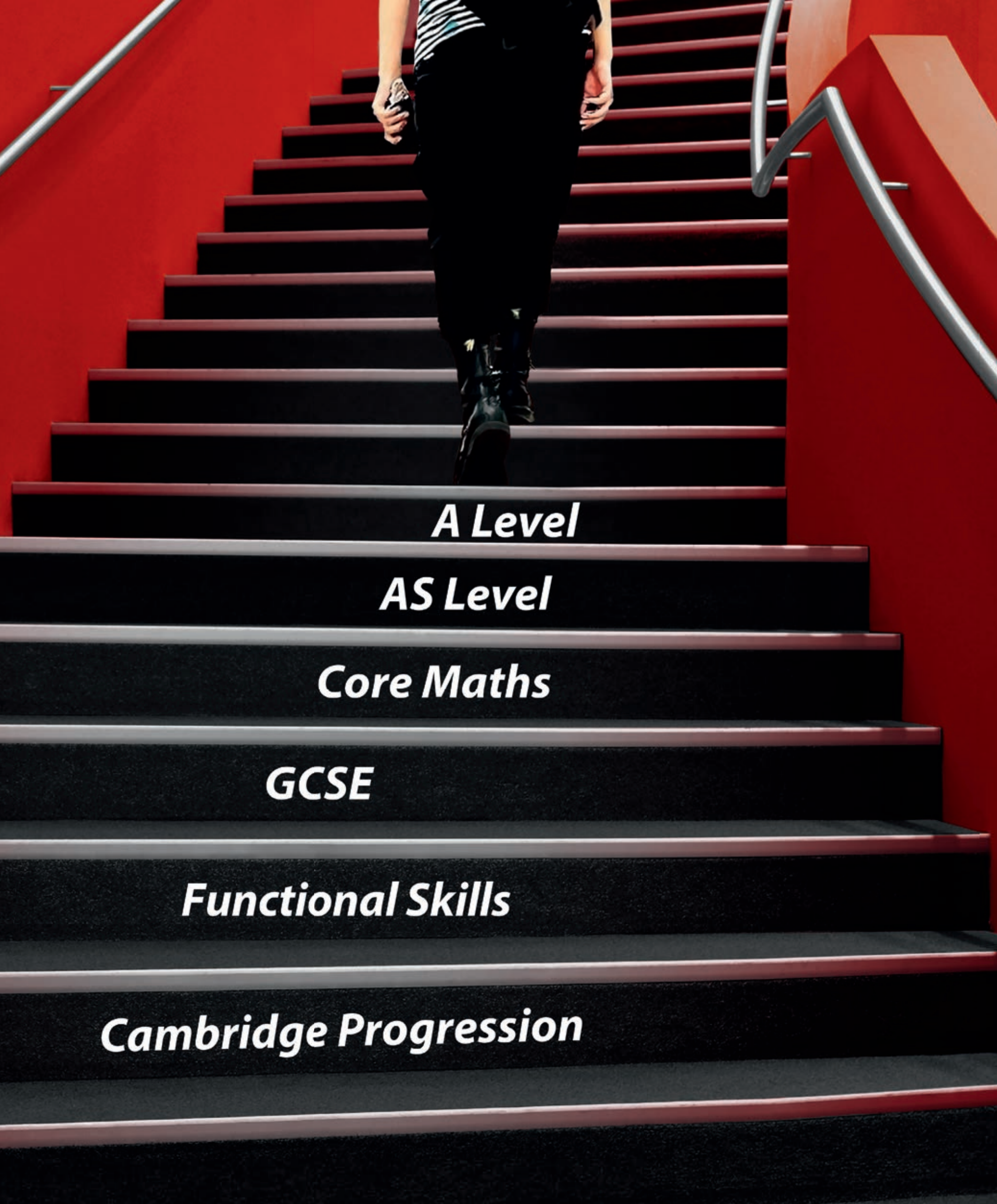
LEARNERS

EVERY STEP

OF THE WAY

It's never been more important for learners to make the grade in maths and English.

That's why we're here to help you and your teams deliver results. Supporting maths and English skills is one of our priorities with a suite of qualifications including Functional Skills, Cambridge Progression, GCSE and A Levels. Combined with innovative support resources including TiME, delivery guides and planning tools – plus support from our Subject Specialists and CPD training, we have the whole solution wrapped up for you.



A Level

AS Level

Core Maths

GCSE

Functional Skills

Cambridge Progression

Numbers are up for maths and English

The tables and graphs below demonstrate changing participation and achievement for FE English and maths courses:

Table showing the increase in the number of 17+ learners entered for maths and English GCSEs between the summer of 2014 and 2015 (information taken from JCQ report on provisional GCSE results published on August 20):

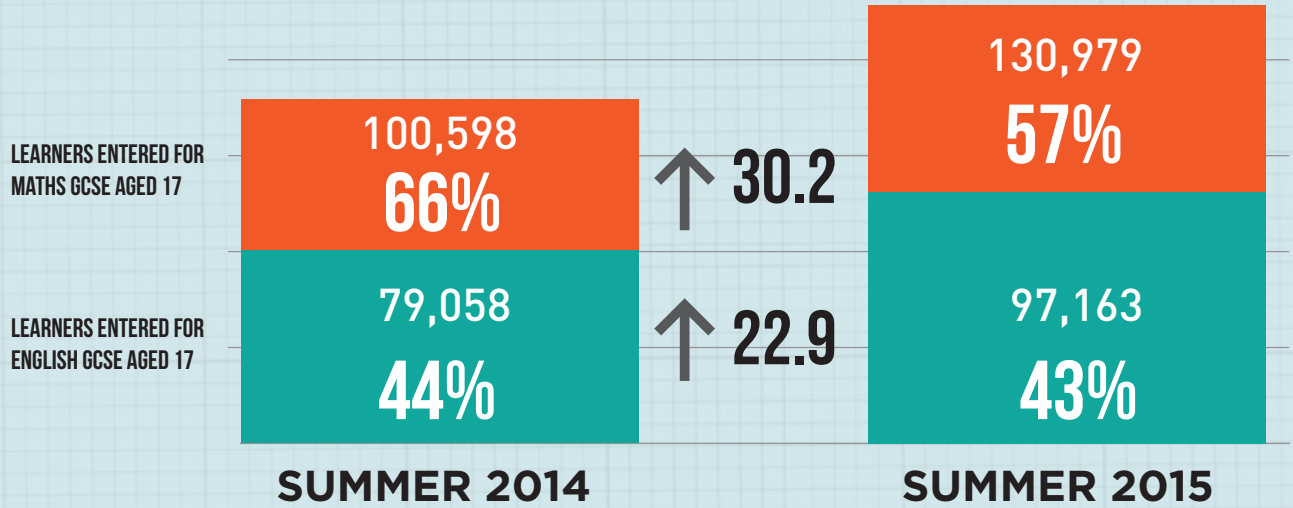


Table showing the number of 17+ learners who achieved A* to C for maths and English in the summer of 2014 and 2015 (information taken from JCQ report on provisional GCSE results published on August 20):

	Summer 2014	Summer 2015
Learners aged 17 who achieved A* to C for English	29,958 (35.1 per cent of total number entered for age group)	34,103 (37.9 per cent of total number entered for age group)
Learners aged 17 who achieved A* to C for maths	39,128 (38.9 per cent of total number entered for age group)	46,890 (35.8 per cent of total number entered for age group)

Table showing number of 19+ learners participating in English and maths course by level (figures taken from October Statistical First Release):

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
English entry level	107,600	120,200	109,000
English level one	379,500	340,900	314,000
English level two	335,400	327,900	308,600
Maths entry level	102,400	95,500	79,100
Maths level one	396,500	346,800	316,800
Maths level two	323,400	334,800	302,500

Table showing number of 19+ learner achievement in English and maths course by level (figures taken from October Statistical First Release include GCSEs and functional skills):

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
English entry level	79,700	90,500	82,000
English level one	175,600	152,000	139,600
English level two	152,800	116,600	127,600
Maths entry level	79,700	73,800	60,000
Maths level one	191,600	165,200	151,800
Maths level two	142,400	129,600	132,900
ESOL entry level	93,700	99,100	97,000
ESOL level one	13,200	15,700	14,000
ESOL level two	5,200	5,700	5,500

English and Maths in FE



Table showing number of 19+ learner achievement in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses (figures taken from October Statistical First Release):

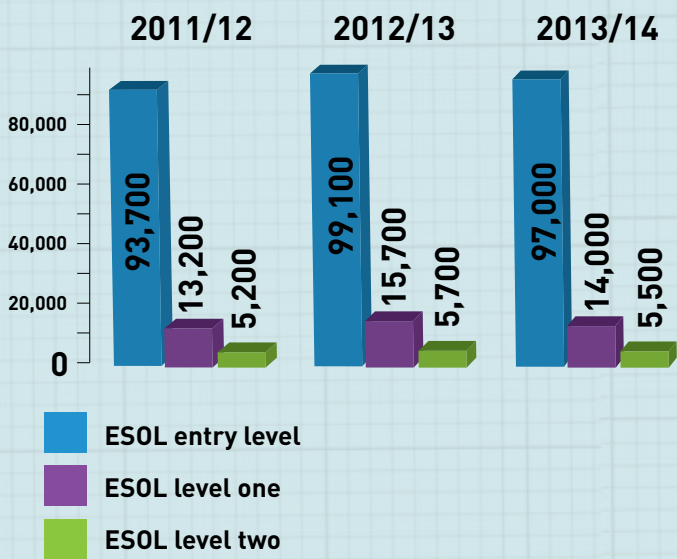
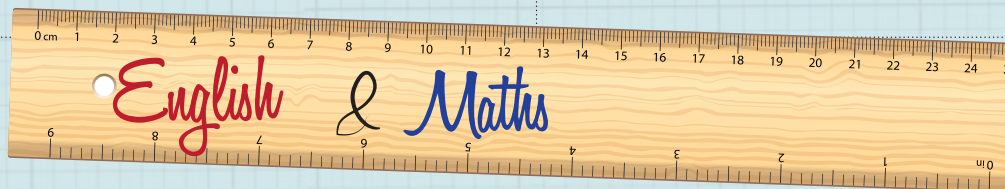
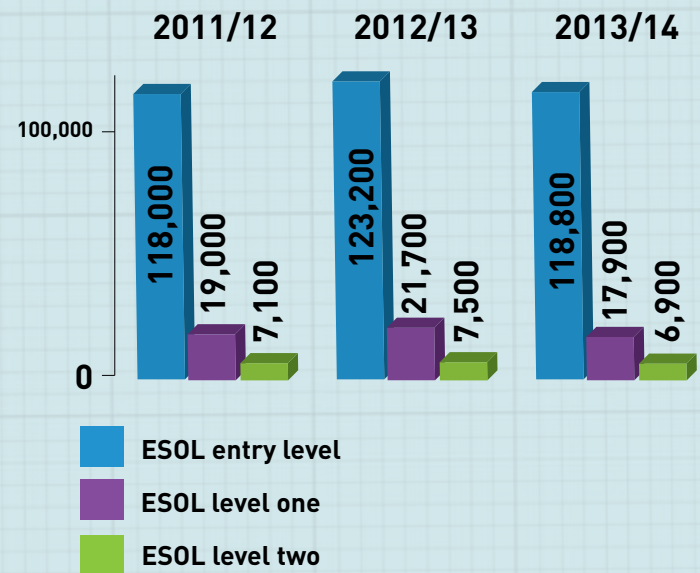
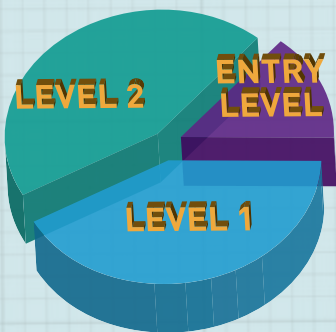


Table showing number of 19+ learner participation in ESOL courses (figures taken from October Statistical First Release):



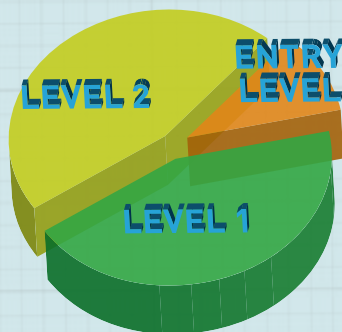
Pie charts showing 19+ English learner participation for 2014/15 (provisional):

English total: 670,200
Entry level: 99,300
Level one: 288,900
Level two: 306,100



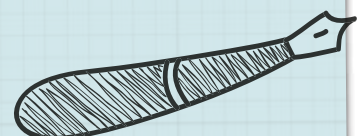
Pie chart showing 19+ maths learner participation for 2014/15 (provisional):

Maths total: 625,000
Entry level: 69,000
Level one: 288,000
Level two: 296,000



Pie chart showing 19+ ESOL learner participation for 2014/15 (provisional):

Entry level: 110,700
Level one: 17,500
Level two: 6,700



Thousands sign up for teaching courses

JUDE BURKE

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Thousands of FE tutors have been busy signing up for training courses geared at helping their colleges and other providers cope with a huge influx in post-16 learners having to resit maths and English GCSE, as reporter Jude Burke discovered.

The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) launched a second wave of “pipeline” training courses that aim to prepare existing FE tutors who often previously specialised in other subjects to teach English and maths from entry from entry level to GCSE in September and last month respectively.

And so far, 278 tutors have enrolled on the new English courses and 154 on equivalent maths courses.

It comes after 2,300 people completed the first round of maths “enhancement programmes” launched by ETF in November 2013, which prepared existing FE tutors to teach the subject at GCSE, with 1,670 people finishing similar English courses launched in September last year.

An ETF spokesperson said the new courses were needed because demand for maths and English teachers had still not “been fully met yet” — after the government made it compulsory for post-16 learners



Stephen Cox

without at least a C-grade in English and maths to continue working towards passing the subjects.

He added that ETF aimed to have 930 tutors enrolled on English pipeline courses and 1,602 signed-up for the maths equivalent by March.

Stephen Cox, head of strategic communications at

ETF, said: “Changes to funding rules mean that learners 16+ often have to retake maths and English, even if they did not succeed in school, and new approaches to help them are often needed.

“The rise in enrolments in these subjects, driven by funding rules, has seen a heavy demand for relevant continuing professional development for teachers.”

Stewart Segal, chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, said feedback from the 600 representatives from independent training providers who had attended the maths and English upskilling courses was “positive”.

“A big reason for their success is that the work-based learning sector has had a significant input in both the programmes’ design and delivery and so the context of the delivery of English and maths as part of, say, an apprenticeship is well understood, which therefore increases the provider’s chances of securing better attainment rates,” he added.

All of the courses are either free or subsidised by the ETF.

The ETF spokesperson said that its maths pipeline already included a self-evaluation tool, which tutors can use to check their knowledge and teaching approach, and a similar tool for the new English course will be available in the next few weeks.

EXPERT

There is a lot at stake for providers and employers through the Functional Skills reform programme but much to be gained too, says Sue Southwood.

In 2000, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) developed an agreed set of standards following national consultation with teachers, managers and relevant national bodies that formed the basis for national qualifications in literacy and numeracy at entry levels, level one, and level two.

Functional Skills, introduced in 2009/10, were based on these standards and follow the same levels.

Unlike previous Skills for Life qualifications, they allow learners to apply their skills in practical situations to prepare them for life and work.

Earlier this year, Making Maths and English Work for All reviewed maths and English provision and qualifications in the post-16 sector.

Functional Skills emerged as the most widely recognised and understood qualifications other than GCSEs.

With over a million certificates issued in 2013/14, Functional Skills are gaining widespread recognition across small and large employers.

The review found that employers who know about them like the approach they embody — applied skills, flexible assessment and problem solving. They are needed because otherwise those who have not achieved a good pass at GCSE have no public certification of the skills they have acquired.

As a result of this review, the ETF has



SUE SOUTHWOOD

FUNCTIONAL SKILLS EXPERT AND THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOUNDATION (ETF) PROGRAMME MANAGER RESPONSIBLE FOR THE REFORM PROGRAMME

Lots at stake for so much to be gained too

been invited by Skills Minister Nick Boles to produce a new set of standards and a report with recommendations to Ministers by August 2016.

The report will make policy recommendations around levels, breadth of skills that the new qualifications should include and the number of guided learning hours needed to successfully achieve Functional Skills for learners on technical and professional programmes of study, including apprenticeships.

Functional Skills have the potential to motivate learners who struggled with maths and English at school. They can be contextualised for vocational learners, helping them to see the relevance and purpose of these subjects.

For many vocational learners, maths and English are seen as ‘school subjects’ and vocational teachers can help make the link to their real-life application.

Flexible assessment suits learners as they can improve their skills and gain a qualification in a shorter space of time and it allows adult learners to join courses at different points in the academic year.

It is also popular with employers, helping them to manage their apprenticeship programmes and tailor training to apprentices’ needs as assessments can be taken at different points in the year.

There’s a lot at stake if we make changes.

Awarding organisations and other stakeholders have invested a lot of time and money in Functional Skills and the qualifications have achieved a lot of recognition in a short time.

A wealth of resources have been developed that directly relate to the qualifications in their current form and teachers are familiar with them.

But there’s also a lot to be gained from a reform programme.

Looking at the standards through the lens of a technology rich environment will ensure they reflect the way we use maths and English in life and at work.

There’s potential to increase the breadth of skills and knowledge required for Functional Skills qualifications, so they are weightier and will be seen by employers, learners and their parents as a reliable indicator of skills in maths and English.

Looking at the standards through the lens of a technology rich environment will ensure they reflect the way we use maths and English in life and at work

It’s also critically important any new qualifications allow all learners to demonstrate their skills and knowledge without unnecessary barriers put in their way and the consultation will specifically engage with those working with learners with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

There may also be implications for ESOL learners and ESOL qualifications and these need to be fully explored.

Subject to further funding, the next phase of the reform programme will put in place a professional development programme for teachers that builds on the ETF’s Maths and English Pipelines and develops new core curricula and resources to support all learners, including learners with SEND.

Our aim is that, by the time the new qualifications are ready in 2018, we will have a workforce prepared to support all learners to achieve their potential in maths and English.

EXPERTS



ROGER FRANCIS

DIRECTOR WITH CREATIVE LEARNING PARTNERS,
A VOCATIONAL TRAINING COMPANY THAT FOCUSES
ON THE DELIVERY OF FUNCTIONAL SKILLS

Practical ideas to achieve improvement

Functional Skills have already exceeded many people's expectations, but providers, employers and the government all needs to help improve them further, says Roger Francis.

Just over five years ago, I was invited by the Association of Employment and Learning Providers to chair a new special interests group (SIG) which had been set up as a discussion forum for Functional Skills.

I vividly remember the first meeting — a packed room (the largest ever attendance for an SIG meeting) and almost without exception, widespread worry about the forthcoming implementation of the new qualification. Scroll forward five years, and the meetings are now very different.

Delegates are keen to share success stories and seeking to further improve their provision rather than forecasting impending doom and the collapse of the Apprenticeship system due to a failure to

achieve Functional Skills qualifications.

But it is not just providers who have warmed to Functional Skills. As was highlighted in the excellent Education and Training Foundation (ETF) report on Functional Skills published in March, nearly 90 per cent of employers who are aware of the qualifications, thought that they were useful or very useful.

Those figures mirror our own experience of working with a wide range of employers and individual learners.

In fact, once they fully appreciate the vocational nature of Functional Skills and their focus on the transfer of skills into workplace roles, many employers view them as being of far more value than the increasingly academic-orientated GCSEs.

However, there are still many challenges.

The ETF report pointed out that more than half of UK employers are unfamiliar with Functional Skills and until the qualifications are as widely recognised and understood as GCSEs, they will never be

fully accepted.

Secondly, as was highlighted within the recent Ofsted apprenticeship report, maths and English provision is often poor.

Over 30 per cent of apprentices fail to complete their course and while the government does not currently provide information as to the reasons behind this worrying figure, failure to complete Functional Skills is almost certainly a significant factor.

Clearly, we need to continue to upskill practitioners, encourage specialist provision and seek innovative ways of using technology to engage learners and improve completion rates.

Thirdly, the attitude of the government towards Functional Skills remains equivocal.

While I welcome Skills Minister Nick Boles' decision to ask the ETF to carry out a further review of Functional Skills with a view to strengthening the qualification and ensuring it is fit for purpose, there is still no clarity as to whether the reformed qualifications would be considered as a like-for-like alternative to GCSEs or remain a stepping stone or consolation prize.

In the meantime 16 to 19-year-olds must continue to work towards achieving a Grade C GCSE, thereby fulfilling Einstein's famous definition of insanity — doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. Finally, it is critical that Functional

Skills are fairly and adequately funded.

The current system is unduly complicated with different rates for delivering the same qualification to different groups of learners.

For example, employers are expected to contribute 50 per cent towards the cost of delivering Functional Skills within the apprenticeship framework.

However in practice, this rarely happens, thereby making delivery of arguably the most challenging component of the frameworks, commercially unviable.

The government is proposing to "fully fund" Functional Skills within the Trailblazer programme, but the proposed funding of £471 per outcome is again woefully inadequate, especially compared to the funding available for GCSEs. This situation will have to change.

We have been privileged to work with many learners whose lives have genuinely been changed by obtaining qualifications in subjects in which they had previously considered themselves as failures. That boost in confidence alone has often been the stimulus to encourage them to re-engage with the learning process to the benefit of themselves, their families and their organisations.

Robust and challenging Functional Skills qualifications, properly funded and effectively promoted, can genuinely become the Gold Standard.

Mike Cox reflects on how the Functional Skills review by the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) could result in them being viewed as equally important to GCSEs

When Nick Boles asked the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) to review Functional Skills in November 2014, I wonder if the minister was expecting the results to show that employers, although concerned about the levels of maths and English of their recruits, were actually less concerned about which qualifications.

That was the headline outcome from the ETF report 'Making maths and English work for all' published in March 2015.

I am not sure it was much of a shock for the many training providers who have successfully been delivering Functional Skills for the last few years.

Although they don't have the same currency of GCSEs among the general public, they do provide a real assessment of the practical skills that people have in the application of maths and English in the workplace.

They also have the advantage in that they can be assessed at a range of levels and at any time rather than only at one or two points in the year like GCSEs.

Doing Functional Skills gives many learners a massive boost of confidence in their own ability to do maths and English, often when they had been given up on the subjects during their schooling.



MIKE COX

OPERATIONS MANAGER OF THE ASSOCIATION OF EMPLOYMENT
AND LEARNING PROVIDERS

Making Functional Skills even more relevant to the workplace

When you talk to employers and look at the way that they advertise vacancies, they almost never ask for GCSEs.

However, they do ask for 'good communications skills' or 'the ability to work with complex data'.

They do sometimes use GCSEs as a way of sifting out job applicants, which is hardly surprising when one considers that for young applicants with no track record of work, they have few other comparative measures to go on.

The Government has now asked the ETF to complete the review of Functional Skills.

The first thing is to ensure that Functional Skills retain the ability to be assessed on demand. GCSEs with their set examination windows do not fit with roll-off provision.

Nor do they work well with flexible personalised programmes for young people that recognise their individual needs.

It is also difficult sometimes to build literacy and numeracy into shorter programmes focused on getting people into work.

For many of these learners, Functional Skills are more appropriate than GCSEs.

Functional Skills are just as challenging and rigorous as GCSEs, and they also provide a programme of study for young people that shows a clear relevance to the workplace. A recent project delivered by AELP and Maths in Education and Industry (MEI) showed how many areas of the GCSE curriculum are difficult to link to real working situations.

Although with some effort this can be achieved, the worked examples are often contrived and rely on complex questions being asked about simple situations rather than what happens in life where simple questions apply to complex situations.

The current Functional Skills

Functional Skills should be a real alternative to GCSEs and be seen by employers and government as such

qualifications benefit from being available at five different levels and from having a curriculum that simulates work and life.

The language used is generally more accessible, especially at lower levels. Being able to understand the questions helps learners show their knowledge.

Functional Skills must be even more focused on relevance to the workplace in that it should be possible to develop specific units for different sectors, such as automotive maths or retail English.

The levels should be retained and maybe even extended to mirror the level three core maths qualification, which has been recently introduced.

Functional Skills should be a real alternative to GCSEs and be seen by employers and government as such rather than as a second rate alternative.

We have a way to go but this must be the long term aim. The review by ETF will be an important part of finally establishing Functional Skills on the same level.



BRIAN CREESE

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICER FOR THE NATIONAL
RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT CENTRE (NRDC) FOR ADULT
LITERACY AND NUMERACY (NRDC)

Whole organisation approach needed

Brian Creeese explains the recommendations from NRDC's strategic guide for delivery of GCSE 16 to 19 English and maths

Earlier this year, NRDC was commissioned by the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) to produce a strategic guide for the delivery of GCSE English and maths to the 16-19 cohort.

Our view, arrived at in conjunction with the providers we worked with, was that the only way of meeting the extreme challenges of this policy was for providers to take a whole organisation approach.

Quite simply, the primary focus of colleges has to shift from purely vocational to integrated programmes in which maths and English learning are as, if not more, important than the vocational learning, something that requires a major cultural shift for staff and students alike.

Another challenge is the scale of change — increases in the number of students taking GCSEs are commonly 200 to 300 per cent.

It leads to challenges which are both educational, where to find good quality GCSE maths and English teachers, and also logistical such as finding big enough exam rooms. Traditionally, FE colleges have been able to offer learners courses which they elected to follow.

The new cohort of learners will include many who do not wish to study English or maths, and also many who have already 'failed' these subjects at GCSE and have no confidence in their ability to do any better.

Added to these factors, the qualifications themselves are changing.

The intention is that both exams should be more demanding and rigorous than currently. New content and assessment requirements mean changes for teachers, students and organisations, which naturally take time to bed in.

The government's intention is that private training providers should be working towards delivering GCSE maths and English alongside apprenticeships or other vocational qualifications.

However, we found the barriers for training providers taking this route to be considerable. While some of these challenges are similar to those affecting GFE colleges, their scale is different.

A large apprenticeship provider may be faced with the nightmare of ensuring that all their students, who are likely to be employed, and located variously across the country, are brought together in one place at the same time to do the GCSE English exam... and then the same for GCSE maths.

It only takes place once they have

The overwhelming feeling in that sector is that currently, at least, GCSEs are not appropriate for the work place educational setting

surmounted perhaps the greater barrier of registering as an exam centre with the Joint Council for Qualifications and meeting their requirements for security and proper oversight of exams.

These barriers can be overcome, but the overwhelming feeling in that sector is that currently, at least, GCSEs are not

appropriate for the work place educational setting. In cooperation with our partner colleges on the project, we identified four key areas which we suggest are crucial for success with this cohort.

Firstly, governance and leadership — how providers develop an effective whole organisational approach to the delivery of GCSE English and mathematics.

It includes the necessity for senior leadership to take responsibility for English and maths, including governor level involvement in order to lead organisational change.

Secondly, curriculum management and course delivery — how managers deal with issues such as choosing the best awarding body for each student cohort, data monitoring, liaison with employers.

Regarding course delivery, it is important how departments are organised, timetabling and considering the optimum teaching approaches.

Thirdly, staffing and continuing professional development (CPD) — how best to utilise their existing staff, consider recruitment of new staff and design effective approaches.

Finally, there is the learning experience to consider — how the learner experiences their GCSE course, what support they receive and how their feedback is valued and used.

How your college overcomes your specific set of challenges will be a matter of what works for you.

David Smith looks back to the 1980s and examines current figures to cast doubt on the wisdom of forcing post-16 learners to resit GCSEs

Employers, parents, carers and education and training providers all agree that skills in English and maths are fundamental for all to productively participate in our economy and society.

However, the Government considers the demonstration of these skills should be through qualifications and in particular the appropriate GCSE grade.

Where schools have been unable to support the achievement of the C-grade GCSE by the end of key stage four (KS4) responsibility for its achievement increasingly falls to the FE and skills sector despite significant reductions in its funding.

We knew back in the 1980s that repeating and resitting qualifications designed for 16-year-olds at the ages of 17 and 18 had never been a strategy for success.

At least in the 1980s, we had the Certificate of Extended Education (CEE) attempting to overcome the re-sit issue.

Nevertheless, the post-16 learner who passes English or mathematics GCSE in 2015 with a grade D by the end of KS4, is required to continue to work towards the GCSE Grade A*-C.

Have retakes become more effective?

To help us understand what was



DAVID SMITH

CO-DIRECTOR AT THE CENTRE FOR POST 14 EDUCATION AND WORK

History shows resits 'never strategy for success'

happening with post-16 English and maths, we looked to the work of our partners at Learning Plus UK.

With the DfE also set to include progress in level two English and maths in the new 16-19 accountability measures, they decided to take a closer look at the DfE's reported outcomes in 2013/2014, compared to 2012/2013.

I should also mention that the most recent DfE data only indicates higher or lower levels of achievement post-16 compared with KS4.

It analyses the achievements of those 16 to 18-year-olds who completed KS4 in 2012 and entered for qualifications by the end of academic year 2013/14.

The first notable point is that Sixth Form Colleges have the greatest percentage of learners achieving a higher level of learning at post-16 when compared to KS4, with 52 per cent of applicable learners managing this in English in 2014, and 41 per cent in maths.

The trend could also be seen in 2013. Of

the students starting at any institution without an A* to C in GCSE English or maths, sixth form colleges and local authority mainstream schools had the greatest percentage of entries into level two English and mathematics at post-16, with 87 per cent and 80 per cent in English, and 81 per cent and 75 per cent in maths.

However, between 2013 and 2014, there have been some quite remarkable changes in the data.

In maths, FE sector colleges have seen the percentage of students achieving a lower level of learning increase quite dramatically from 2 per cent to 38 per cent.

However, these changes reflect the overall percentage of learners entered for retakes.

Nonetheless, the data shows little movement over time, with learners achieving a lower level of learning decreasing ever so slightly in the majority of cases.

It appears that we have learnt nothing.

Students' motivation to succeed in English and maths post-16 is often enhanced

Students' motivation to succeed in English and maths post-16 is often enhanced by a skills-based vocational context and a focus on progression

by a skills-based vocational context and a focus on progression.

We need a fit-for-purpose qualification which is able to build on this rather than the Education Funding Agency's focus on traditional GCSE.

The strategy adopted by many colleges is not to say the same things again, but louder.

It is to say things differently, to provide vocational context, to adopt alternative timetable models, to implement whole institution feedback models, to focus on vocabulary, spelling, and grammar and to differentiate learners' needs.

Could skills in English and mathematics be assessed in the context of employability and progression but with the rigour of GCSE? Is that a contradiction too far?

Numerical grades to impact on provision

ALIX ROBERTSON

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With new numerical GCSE grading introduced from the start of this academic year, reporter Alix Robertson takes a look at how this will affect maths and English provision in FE.

Learners who started on two-year GCSEs in 2015/16 will have their performance measured by a numerical system instead of the old A* to G scale. It means they will be graded from one to nine, with nine being the best possible grade.

Gemma Gathercole, OCR's head of policy for FE, raised concern that the grading changes will mean fewer maths and English passes at school key stage four, which will put more pressure on colleges to prepare students that fail for resits.

"It's early days, but FE Colleges are going to need all the help they can get to deal with what's likely to be a significant increase in students needing to re-take GCSEs — maths in particular.

"Commentators have estimated between 15 and 20 per cent of students will fail to achieve a 'good' pass of five under the new grading system."

It comes after the government introduced a funding rule that initially stated that most 16 to 18 students who does not have a grade C in English and maths and fails to enrol in the subjects while studying with an FE provider would be removed from the 2016/17 funding

allocation.

Providers already having to cater for extra 16 to 18 learners studying maths and English will be concerned that numerical grading will lead to a further large increase in learner numbers.

A "postcard" published ahead of the start of the current academic year by exam regulator Ofqual further explained the impact of numerical grading.

It indicated that a grade five — known as a "good pass" — would only be awarded to the top third of pupils who previously achieved a C grade.

A Department for Education (DfE) spokesperson told *FE Week* on Thursday (November 12) that the funding rule would apply for learners who failed to achieve grade four GCSE English and maths until the end of 2018/19.

But she added that all learners who failed to achieve maths and English grade five would have to resit while studying FE courses from later in 2019, in order for the provider to receive funding. The exact dates for this are still to be confirmed.

Analysis carried out by *FE Week* of provisional 2015 GCSE results data published in August showed that 29 per cent of all 413,891 16-year-olds who sat English achieved a C-grade.

The Ofqual guidance indicated that 9.7 per cent (40,009) of them would have been likely to get a grade five, while 18.9 per cent (80,019) would have failed.

Meanwhile for maths, 30.6 per cent of all 596,767

16-year-olds who sat English achieved a C-grade.

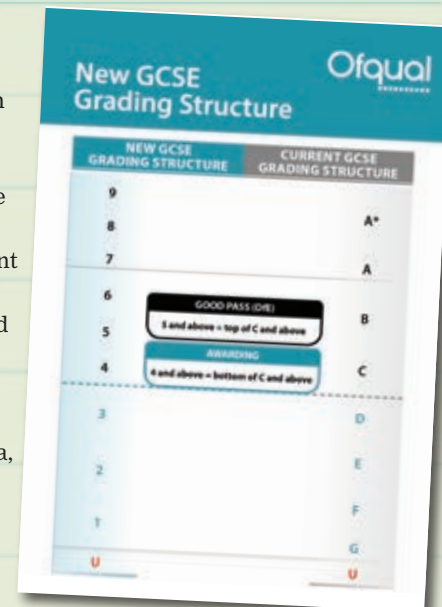
Following the same guidance, only 10.2 per cent (60,870) would have passed and 20.4 per cent (121,740) would have failed.

Deepa Jethwa, policy officer at the Sixth Form Colleges' Association, said explaining the GCSE changes to students would be challenging.

"Colleges will have to decide how to explain this to potential students and ensure their entry criteria is easy to understand," she said.

Setting qualification thresholds, for example with maths and English FE courses, could also be problematic, Ms Jethwa added.

"As there will be no direct equivalent to the current grade C, colleges will need to decide if students are required to have a grade five, or a grade four to gain entry to particular A-level courses."



CATHERINE SEZEN

14-19 AND CURRICULUM SENIOR POLICY MANAGER AT THE ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES

Coping with huge resit challenge

Colleges have risen impressively to the challenge of supporting large numbers of extra learners having to carry on studying maths and English post-16, says Catherine Sezen

Further education has long been known for its focus on providing employment focused skills training to meet the needs of young people and adults at a variety of levels.

However, the past two years have seen colleges being asked to shift their focus to meet the demand for improving the core skills of English and maths for 16 to 18-year-olds.

Nearly 40 per cent of young people do not achieve an A* to C grade in English and maths GCSE at 16. The vast majority of these young people go on to study at colleges.

The 2014/15 academic year witnessed the first year of 'compulsory' maths and English

delivery as a part of study programmes for young people studying post-16.

Colleges had previously delivered maths and English to 16 to 18-year-olds.

However, this was the first time it was a mandatory requirement and for both subjects to be delivered concurrently.

It was also the first time that there was a focus on working towards GCSE.

For some colleges, this initiative saw numbers rise for GCSE entries for younger students from double figures to more than 400 in both subjects.

It presented issues with staffing, timetables, rooming and providing support for students with special educational needs — over a third of the cohort in some cases — culminating in some colleges needing to hire external premises for the exam season in June.

Colleges' response to this shift in priorities was to embrace it and enable many more young people to achieve a

C-grade in English and maths, alongside many others took Functional Skills qualifications.

The challenge now is to continue to build on the momentum, share good practice, encourage more trainee and existing English and maths teachers to join the FE sector and continue to bring success and vital life and employability skills to more young people.

Finding the best staff to achieve this is perhaps the greatest challenge.

Much has been made of the importance of employing staff with excellent English and maths qualifications and without a doubt such colleagues bring welcome subject expertise.

However, when working with young people who feel they have failed and have struggled to understand key concepts, it also helps to have teachers within the team who can address issues of lack of self-confidence and motivation.

Some of the most inspirational staff, especially at the stepping stone stage, are those who themselves have found maths concepts, for example, a struggle in the past and can empathise with students.

These staff can be supported to improve their own English and maths skills, but also bring a vital understanding of the frustrations of grappling with concepts which are more challenging to teach and learn.

Another challenge is the relevance of the

qualifications to the students.

The focus on essay writing in English, for example, does not prepare students for the demands of the work-place, writing reports, emails or letters do not feature in GCSE English.

For some colleges, this initiative saw numbers rise for GCSE entries for younger students from double figures to more than 400 in both subjects

The Government has announced a reform programme for these valuable qualifications to ensure that they are more rigorous.

The work-related focus of Functional Skills would make them the best option for employers who want to take on young people who are prepared for the workplace.

They would also be more relevant to adult students already in employment who want to sharpen skills.

Adults still need a GCSE level course, but perhaps this more practical qualification would be more appropriate for those already in the world of work or those trying to return to the workforce.

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