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A time of innovation for English and maths



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Four years have gone by since *FE Week's* last post-16 English and maths supplement, but that is not to say little has happened since then.

The provision has gone through some major changes, from the unfolding of the controversial condition of funding rule to reforming functional skills qualifications.

As a result, we thought there was no better time than the present to publish an update on what has been happening in English and maths and what the sector has been doing to ensure student success whilst battling with excruciatingly tight budgets.

Sponsored by the NCFE, this supplement includes news, analysis, opinions and guidance. It is also an opportunity to showcase some best-practice projects in the sector, new

teaching styles and innovative uses of technology and resources to optimise student outcomes.

On page three, we focus on what has been happening in the recently announced Maths Centres for Excellence, which are being funded with a £40 million pot, as well as a teaching method that has proved fruitful in China and Singapore and is now breaking through in English colleges.

Pages four and five provide a detailed explanation of the English and maths functional skills reforms, which have been on the books for the past four years and will finally be introduced from September. This includes a piece from Ofqual's Phil Beach, who explains everything providers and awarding bodies need to know in preparation.

On page seven, we report on an innovative new approach being tested in 80 colleges, called the 5Rs, which aims to improve GCSE maths resits, as well as text-message trials which have been run to boost results and cut dropout rates.

The supplement also features other initiatives led by colleges across the country, including summer courses for adults, and yoga classes to combat stress

during exam time (on page 14), as well as The Manchester College piloting of "nuanced", non-computerised diagnostic assessments to improve GCSE English teaching and outcomes (on page 13).

Skills minister Anne Milton writes about the government's approach to English and maths on page six, while the ETF's head of programmes in maths and English, Imke Djouadj, explains why colleges shouldn't teach phonics to adults in the way it's taught to children, when the teaching style is introduced into functional skills in September.

We also have Bedford College Group vice principal Corrie Harris discussing the benefits of a free course being offered by the Open University (on page 12).

Leading sector experts Mark Dawe, boss of the Association of Employment and Learning providers, and Stephen Evans, chief executive at the Learning and Work Institute, conclude the supplement with articles, respectively, about how functional skills funding is discriminatory, and why the country should have higher ambitions for literacy and numeracy skills which are "fundamental building blocks for life".

EVE RICHARDSON

Director, NCFE



NCFE conference report: the future of English and maths

Eve Richardson reports back on all the news and views from the NCFE's recent conference on functional skills

In line with our ongoing #FullyFunctional campaign, we recently hosted a conference to highlight the current standings of English and maths with the aim of creating a level playing field for all in the future.

Over 100 delegates from various organisations attended the event to hear a range of speakers from the sector offering different perspectives and experiences.

Stewart Foster, chief operating officer at NCFE, kickstarted the event and set out NCFE's perspective on the existing landscape regarding English and maths qualifications in the sector, and described the way forward. Foster highlighted the importance of learners having the opportunity to study qualifications

suitable to their needs to enable them to make progress in their lives and careers.

Mark Dawe, chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP), was the first of four keynote speakers. Dawe is an advocate of English and maths being critical skills for all and argues that the current GCSE retake policy is not fit for purpose. He discussed the importance of diagnostics for learners to ensure they are studying the right qualification and level in order to give them the best chance of success.

Dawe was followed by Catherine Sezen, senior policy manager at the Association of Colleges (AoC), who provided a statistical overview of the current policy and how it affects further education. Sezen highlighted the importance of celebrating the success of those who do achieve as well as the

importance of offering an inclusive solution for those who would benefit from having access to alternative English and maths qualifications.

Stephen Evans of the Learning and Work Institute gave an overview of the increasing importance of English and maths. This is especially true for adults, with statistics showing that nine million adults in England have low literacy and/or numeracy alongside a 30 per cent fall in the number of adults participating in literacy and numeracy learning. Evans discussed solutions that include building on the current condition of funding as well as a huge focus needed on improving basic skills for adults.

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Statistics show 9 million people in England have low literary/numeracy

Our final keynote speaker was 20-year-old Joshua Dixon, who told his personal story of being removed from mainstream school after struggling with both his home

and school life before defying his critics. He managed to find his motivation again after being accepted to study at Leeds City College Apprenticeship Academy. Here, he connected with his teachers and felt re-engaged with education that "made sense" to him. Through studying functional skills and an apprenticeship, Dixon has achieved huge success and has become the founder and chief executive of three successful recruitment companies.

The keynote speakers left the audience inspired, motivated and encouraged.

After lunch, delegates attended interactive workshops covering core maths and phonics hosted by experts from the University of Plymouth and Attuned Education. Dean Blewitt and David Redden from NCFE also delivered an informative workshop on mapping functional skills content to the new reformed qualifications.

Gail Rochester, head of business development at NCFE, concluded the conference with a session highlighting the features and benefits of NCFE's English and maths offer across Functional Skills, Core Maths and bite-sized English and maths interventions.

It was great to see so many of our customers in attendance, sharing our goal to ensure that learners are given the opportunity to succeed by taking qualifications that are best for them.

Find out more about our #FullyFunctional campaign and how you can get involved.

Maths Centres for Excellence: two colleges explain the appeal of this experimental new approach

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Being one of the Maths Centres for Excellence is allowing colleges to expand their arsenal of teaching tools, rip up their teaching plans and fire up their students.

That's according to leaders at two colleges that are set to open the pioneering centres, who *FE Week* spoke to: Leeds City College and Fareham College.

The government originally announced in the 2017 Budget that new approaches to improving GCSE maths resit outcomes would be tested by new Maths Centres for Excellence, based at colleges across the country.

In October the names were revealed of the 21 colleges, which would share £40 million over five years to train maths teachers and spread best practice.

The programme is focused on four activity themes: a mastery approach to mathematics, suitable for the post-16 sector; relating maths to real-world situations; motivating and engaging learners; and the use of data and technology within maths education.

Ten or more provider organisations will partner with

each of the colleges, which must have 250 students with a GCSE below grades 9 to 4 to become a centre.

The project is being managed by the Education & Training Foundation, and a host of organisations are playing support roles; including Pearson and the Association of Colleges, with the University of Nottingham leading research into the approaches the colleges are trialling.

The project has allowed colleges to break away from more traditional, classroom-based methods of teaching maths, according to those involved.

Leeds City College had previously held three-hour block sessions of maths, as well as English, but has now made it more flexible and "comfortable" for learners by allowing each department, whether it be hair and beauty, sport, or science, to break up the sessions into smaller time slots.

As chief executive Colin Booth explained, many of the learners had already studied the GCSE maths syllabus and not passed the exam.

Why then, he asked, "are we doing the exactly same thing again?"

Colin Booth



The college decided to focus primarily on two of the themes: motivation and engagement, and the use of technology.

With regards to technology, the college lets its learners use Google Chromebooks, reader pens and maths applications; learners can also get a video before the start of a maths class to find out what they will be taught.

Furthermore, Leeds has experimented with different formats of teaching, by hiring coaches to run individualised sessions with learners, where they can focus on the skills they need to improve on.

The head of the college's centre of excellence, Carol Layall, said: "A lot of students come to FE and they have given up. They haven't got on with the teacher, there has been 30-odd kids in the classroom.

"They come to us and there are smaller class sizes, they have a teacher and a study coach, so hopefully they feel a bit more confident about giving it a go."

As part of its focus on motivation and engagement, the college is also offering free breakfasts on exam days, and vouchers if a learner attends all of their exams.

Consequently, Layall believed she could feel a "real buzz" after the maths exam this year, and there was over 90 per cent attendance.

Fareham College has also explored



changing its class structure to see if it improves outcomes.

They have looked at small group intervention, which principal Andrew Kaye explained works on the basis there is a greater impact with small groups of students for shorter periods of time, than there is with large groups, which are highly differentiated, in longer lessons.

Fareham is also upskilling its learning support assistants in maths, and partnering leading maths teachers in local secondary schools with FE colleges to support the latter in teaching and learning.

Kaye said he believed the centres are a "tremendous opportunity" and provide value for money.

Maths 'mastery' teaching to be rolled out in colleges

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The "mastery" approach to teaching maths is about to be rolled out in FE, after a trial found that it increased student engagement and motivation to pass their GCSE resits.

The project, which concluded in March, was conducted for the Education & Training Foundation by Sheffield Hallam University's Institute of Education.

It involved four colleges and two offender learner organisations and looked at how the approach, which is used in China and Singapore, and now in UK primary and secondary schools, can help to address the challenge the FE sector faces in helping its learners to achieve a pass grade in a level 2 maths qualification.

Learners are taught through whole-class interactive teaching, where the focus is on all learners working together on the same lesson content at the same time.

This is intended to ensure that all students master concepts before moving to the next part of the curriculum sequence.

The trial found the approach had benefits to learners, such as high levels of engagement and increased motivation, learning from one another as they engaged in different activities and a tendency for lessons to be more creative, according to the ETF.

The colleges involved – Chesterfield College, The Sheffield College, Grimsby Institute of Higher and Further Education, and New City College – are now planning to start using the mastery approach from September.

Sarah Boodt, senior lecturer in post-16 education at Sheffield Hallam University, explained the approach was about teaching maths through dialogue and conversations, and "getting students to look at the maths as another language".

She said students saw the subject being taught from a different approach and were less resistant to it and more willing to engage with it.

"Students were learning from each other and they were using the framework

we gave them to ask questions and they were using it as an internal dialogue," she added.

"In the past, teachers reported that students just gave each other the answer and when they were working with mastery approaches they actually started feeding each other questions to help their peers find the answer.

"It was more active learning rather than sitting down and teachers telling them what to do."

Sally Drury, GCSE maths co-ordinator at Chesterfield College, said: "Maths mastery is good in the classroom because it puts everyone on a level-playing field. We've got a lot of discussions about what they are learning, what they know and what they don't know.

"The students really like the lessons, they are more interactive. It's noisier, and they are engaging more in the work.

"The resources that we use are far more practical things: cards-sorting activities, photographs, pictures, things that might relate to their everyday activities. Sometimes they don't realise they are doing maths."



However, teachers also found that the success of the approach depended on the number of students, being more effective in smaller groups.

Emma Bell, maths enhancement manager at the Grimsby Institute, said: "As teachers of the post-16 maths resit, we can see that this approach perfectly fits what we want for our students. Those students who have been branded as 'failures' can achieve. They can actually not mind being in a maths lesson.

"We can't wait to see how far we can take this approach, with the whole department adopting teaching for mastery."

Need to know: What the reformed functional skills

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After four years of development the government will roll out a reformed suite of functional skills qualifications in English and maths from September.

While many components will stay the same, officials appear to have made the qualifications more academic than the legacy versions.

But first, let's talk about what is staying.

The reformed qualifications will continue to have the three components of speaking, listening and communicating, reading and writing, which all need to be passed to achieve the overall award of English.

For maths, they will continue to have the three core sections that relate to number, measure and shape, and data handling, which all need to be passed.

As before, the reformed qualifications will enable level 1 and 2 to be available to support skill development, progression and attainment and each level to build on

the skills of the previous levels.

Level 1 and level 2 assessments will continue to be externally set and externally marked, apart from the speaking, listening and communicating component, which will still be internally assessed by the centre and externally moderated by the awarding organisation.

While the qualifications will remain graded on a pass/fail basis and questions will continue to be based on everyday contexts and scenarios, Ofqual said there will be more specific common content to increase comparability between awarding organisations' qualifications.

As for the changes, the Department for Education's consultation published two years ago said the content of the English qualification will have a "greater focus on oral communication, and the requirements for spelling, punctuation and grammar have been strengthened".

Students will be expected to complete parts without dictionaries or computer aid, and phonics has been added.

And in maths the reformed content has "a strong focus on contextualising knowledge and skills to improve the

relevance for students; for example, calculating percentages based on VAT or calculating simple compound interest".

This includes using times tables and working with and without a calculator.

The maths qualifications will also include mathematical literacy, approximation, estimation and checking.

Because of these changes, the guided

learning hours for the functional skills qualifications will increase from 45 to 55 hours.

Over the next two pages we have pulled out the major changes, and Ofqual's executive director for vocational and technical qualifications, Phil Beach, explains everything providers and awarding bodies need to know in preparation.

Minimum and maximum overall assessment times

| | Minimum times | | Maximum times | |
|------------------------------|---------------|---------------------|---------------|---------------------|
| | Proposed | Change from current | Proposed | Change from current |
| English – Levels 1 and 2 | 2 hrs | n/a | 3 hrs | n/a |
| English – Entry levels | 1 hr 30 mins | +30 mins | 2 hrs | n/a |
| Mathematics – Levels 1 and 2 | 1 hr 45 mins | +15 mins | 2 hrs 30 mins | +30 mins |
| Mathematics – Entry levels | 1 hr 15 mins | +15 mins | 1 hr 45 mins | +15 mins |

ENGLISH - KEY CHANGES

Phonics

The structured teaching of phonics will be introduced to teach students at entry levels for reading and writing. This has been added in order to build reading skills, as it provides the "foundation needed to sound words out in order to read words automatically on sight".

Reading

Reading is now defined as the "independent understanding of written language in specific contexts". This can be demonstrated through the use of texts on screen or on paper. Students will be required to read and understand a range of specialist words in context at level 1. At level 2, they will need to identify implicit and inferred meaning in texts and analyse texts, of different levels of complexity, recognising their use of vocabulary and identifying levels of formality and bias.

Contextualisation

An emphasis on "contextualisation" – putting language items into a meaningful and real context rather than being treated as isolated items – is being introduced for speaking, listening, communicating, and writing.

Writing

Writing is defined as the "independent construction of written language to communicate in specific contexts". Text can be written on paper or electronically. The new guidance sets out that, at level 1, students need to communicate information, ideas and opinions clearly, coherently and accurately. At level 2, they are required to use different language and register (such as persuasive techniques, supporting evidence, specialist words), suited to various audiences.

Spelling, punctuation and grammar

According to the government's new definition, 'speaking, listening and communicating' within functional skills English is non-written communication, conducted face-to-face, and can also include "virtual" communication methods such as telephone or spoken web-based technologies (Skype, for example).

Dictionaries

The reforms say no dictionaries or spell check enabled equipment will be allowed in writing assessments. This is a "necessary consequence" of the subject content requirement to assess learners' underpinning skills, although Ofqual did admit this will have a negative impact on a number of learners, including those with particular disabilities such as dyslexia.

Functional skills will look like from September

MATHS - KEY CHANGES

Contextualising knowledge

Responding to the needs of employers, the reformed content will have a stronger focus on contextualising knowledge and skills to improve the relevance of maths for students in their lives. Functional skills mathematics at level 1 and 2 should ensure people can “demonstrate a sound grasp of maths” and the “ability to apply mathematical thinking effectively to solve problems successfully in the workplace and in other real life situations”. This will include calculating percentages based on VAT or calculating simple compound interest.

Solving mathematical problems

Mathematical problems will be based on the knowledge and/or skills in the content areas: number and the number system; common measures, shape and space; information and data. At Level 1, it is expected that students will be able to address individual problems, with some combining any two of the mathematical content areas. At Level 2, it is expected that students will be able to address individual problems combining all three mathematical areas.

Underpinning skills

Underpinning skills are “the ability to do maths when not part of a problem”. Ofqual said that, to reflect everyday life situations, and the “functional nature” of these qualifications, there should be more emphasis on underpinning skills and problem solving in an applied context.

Calculator and non-calculator tasks

Current functional skills qualifications in maths allow learners to use a calculator throughout the assessment, but the reforms will require assessments to be both calculator and non-calculator. Ofqual has set out weighting of 25 per cent non-calculator questions/tasks and 75 per cent of questions/tasks where calculator use is permitted.

PHIL BEACH

Executive Director for Vocational and Technical Qualifications, Ofqual



What you need to know ahead of teaching from September 1, 2019

Ofqual's Phil Beach describes the changes of the design and delivery of the new Functional Skills qualifications, launching this autumn

Ofqual regulates high-stakes vocational and technical qualifications with the same focus and seriousness as it does GCSEs and A-levels.

The government decided in 2015 to reform Functional Skills qualifications (FSQs) in English and maths, and from September 1, 2019, a reformed suite of qualifications will be available.

In summary, the level of demand for the new qualifications remains the same, but the new qualifications better meet employer needs in terms of the knowledge and skills that learners achieve. And we have used the reform as an opportunity to strengthen the design and delivery of FSQs, through the establishment of qualification-level rules

and a technical evaluation process that has driven up quality and improved consistency.

Content changes

The Department for Education, which is responsible for subject content, has introduced much more specific common content. For English, this includes a focus on spelling, punctuation and grammar, without the aid of dictionaries or spell checks. And at entry levels, there will be detailed reading and spelling expectations based on the structured teaching of phonics.

For maths, the content draws upon the underpinning knowledge and skills needed to solve mathematical problems, with and without a calculator.

Qualification design and structure

We have used the reform to better secure comparability between the qualifications

over time and across different awarding organisations. We have thought carefully and refined our thinking in response to consultation feedback about how to regulate these qualifications.

Based on feedback, we kept some of the features that worked well in legacy FSQs, for example, continuing to permit on-demand assessment and using a pass/fail grading system. We have also made some changes to the qualifications, including changes to the duration of assessments and, in line with DfE expectations, there will be an increase in the number of guided learning hours to 55. In addition, Level 1 and Level 2 assessments (with the exception of speaking, listening and communicating in English) continue to be set and marked by the awarding organisations. Our rules also allow the context of entry-level assessment tasks to be adapted by teachers to reflect situations in which their students may use the skills being assessed.

Technical evaluation

All new FSQs are going through our technical evaluation process before being made available. A combination of independent subject experts and Ofqual assessment experts have reviewed a range of materials against our rules. During this process, we have considered issues such as level of demand, coverage of the DfE's subject content, and the quality of questions

and their associated mark schemes. We have also reviewed each awarding organisation's assessment strategy, the key document in which they explain their approach to the design and delivery of their qualification.

Timeline

First teaching of these qualifications is September 1, 2019 and, from this date, new learners will need to be registered for the new versions of FSQs. Learners already registered on legacy English and maths FSQs will have until August 31, 2020 to be awarded their qualifications, after which they will be withdrawn. A number of qualifications have already gone through technical evaluation and are ready to be made available to schools and colleges. We have contacted all awarding organisations offering reformed FSQs and asked them to publish their draft specifications and sample assessment materials. This will give teachers a broad idea of the overall paper and mark scheme design.

First awarding

We know that when qualifications change, it can take some time for teachers to get used to the new versions, often because there are fewer resources available. We will expect Awarding Organisations to take this into account when setting pass marks for the reformed qualifications so that learners are not disadvantaged.

ANNE MILTON

Minister for skills and apprenticeships

Essential skills must be rolled out to everyone

English and maths skills are vital for getting a job, pursuing further study or an apprenticeship and being able to play a full part in society, says Anne Milton

We've made good progress to boost the standard of education and training available to young people, so they leave education with a firm grasp of literacy and numeracy. This includes reforming maths and English GCSEs and introducing the requirement, in 2014, for young people to continue studying English and maths, if they haven't already achieved a 9 to 4 at GCSE.

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We are investing £50m to improve post-16 maths provision

It's good to see that over 70 per cent of 19-year-olds now hold a level 2 qualification in both English and maths. The reforms we made have been important, but this success is largely due to the hard work and dedication of the teachers and students.

We recognise that providers work very hard to help students improve English and maths skills. Following feedback from the sector, we have made an adjustment to the condition of funding policy for the academic year 2019-2020. This means that students who have a GCSE grade 2 or below now have the option to study maths or English Functional Skills at Level 2 instead of retaking their GCSE. Providers can help those students to decide which qualification is right for them.

There is still more we can do to make sure more people get help to boost their English and maths. We are investing £50m to improve the quality of post-16 maths provision. This includes 21 new Centres for Excellence in Maths that support networks

of providers across the country. I visited one of these centres and it is fantastic to see the excellent work they are doing. Over 450 post-16 providers are also participating in our Basic Maths Premium Pilot which is testing the impact on outcomes of up to £500 more in funding per eligible student.

We have also reformed Functional Skills qualifications including English and maths so that they are high quality, teach students the skills they need for everyday life and work, and are better recognised by employers. The new qualifications will be taught from this September. And we are also investing more widely in professional development for teachers, and research on best practice to improve quality of post-16 English and maths.

To support this, we also fully fund a range of maths and English courses for adults up to Level 2.

In addition, we are running a trial until the end of the 2019-20 academic year, to support adult learners aged 19 and over who are in low-paid work to access the Adult Education Budget. This allows providers to fully fund eligible learners, including ESOL learners on low wages. This directly supports social mobility by enabling those in low-paid jobs to learn more skills and earn higher wages.

Finally, as part of the Integrated Communities Strategy, we are working across government to develop plans to support speakers of other languages to develop their English skills. We've worked with a range of providers, representative groups and experts to understand the priorities that we should consider. Recently, we commissioned a set of teaching resources for students who are new to English as a Second Language (ESOL) or who have limited literacy skills, to support the sector in meeting the increasing demand for this provision.

I share the determination that everyone, no matter what their background, where they live or who they know, should have the opportunity to gain these essential skills. I'm hugely grateful to every teacher, tutor and manager in the FE sector who works tirelessly to achieve this.

IMKE DJOUADJ

Head of Programmes:
maths and English, ETF

Introducing the Post-16 Phonics Approaches Toolkit

We shouldn't teach phonics to adults in the way we teach it to children, says Imke Djouadj

Research report

The introduction of phonics in the new Functional Skills English entry-level qualifications from September 2019 means a new focus on approaches to phonics teaching in the post-16 sector.

The key question to be answered is: what approach will best work with adults? As part of the Education & Training Foundation's (ETF) role as the sector's national workforce development body, and with funding from the Department for Education (DfE), we have been on a journey to find the evidence and build the right tools for teachers and trainers to use. This has included working with experts, providers and practitioners to ensure that a rigorous and evidence-based approach was front and centre.

Evidence-gathering

In early 2018, the ETF commissioned new research from UCL Institute of Education to review the extent to which phonics approaches are currently used with entry-level learners across the sector and to identify how adult literacy tutors might be supported to use phonics approaches effectively.

The research looked at practitioners' knowledge and experience of:

- teaching Functional Skills English
- approaches to pedagogy
- tutor knowledge and expertise
- enablers and barriers to the effective use of phonics with adult literacy learners
- benefits and drawbacks of making phonics approaches central to adult literacy teaching

We published the research findings in the DfE-funded report *Current Practice in Using a System of Phonics with Post-16 Learners*.

The key findings are:

- a systematic and explicit approach to phonics can be useful and important in the development of adult literacy.
- tutor expertise is a crucial component in appropriately selecting and pacing the use of phonics resources in ways that help the learner to gain confidence and develop skills.
- taking an existing phonics scheme designed for use in primary schools and importing it into the adult context is unlikely to be effective. Decoding and encoding skills will be strengthened if they are taught in such a

way that they engage adult learners.

The anonymised findings in the report provided effective background guidance to the sector in the run-up to the reform of the Functional Skills English curriculum. The really crucial point being that what is appropriate for teaching phonics to those in schools is not right for adult learners.

Developing the tools

From these findings we developed the 'Post-16 Phonics Approaches Toolkit', designed to support practitioners exploring the use of phonics approaches with post-16 learners.

The new flexible, learner-centred toolkit introduces resources created specifically for adult learners, explains how to put post-16 phonics approaches into practice in different settings, and explores how to adjust pace and sequence.

It is the product of the partnership between the ETF, UCL Institute of Education and ccConsultancy and supports the broader work that the ETF is doing to support the Functional Skills Reform programme. The toolkit was developed through collaboration with practitioners at eight further education providers – the Army Education Centre, Bishop Burton College, Essex Adult Community Learning Service, Kendal College, North Lancs Training Group, North Tyneside Council Adult Learning Service, Novus/HMP Haverigg, and Redcar and Cleveland College.

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A phonics scheme designed for primary schools is unlikely to be effective for adults

In addition to the toolkit, through funding from the DfE, the ETF has built a full CPD support offer to help practitioners new to phonics to try out innovative teaching approaches, both with their entry-level functional skills learners and other post-16 students.

Trials to begin of new '5Rs' programme for GCSE maths resitters

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Eighty colleges will trial an innovative approach to improving GCSE maths resit results, enigmatically called "The 5Rs".

The 5Rs will involve 16-to-19-year-olds who gained a grade 3 or below in the qualification at school.

Students will start with three "very short" initial diagnostic tests to determine a student's current ability and where their weaknesses lie in the nine basics of maths: adding, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions, decimals, percentages, scale and ratio.

They will then be taught with tailored lesson structures and content, as well as "best practice" revision resources.

The trial, scheduled to take place in 2019-20, is being funded by the Education Endowment Fund (EEF), evaluated by the University of York, and run in partnership with the Association of Colleges.

It will be conducted at 80 colleges, sixth forms, UTCs and independent learning providers; 40 of which will test the 5Rs approach, 40 of which will carry on "business as usual" to compare results.

According to the trial's memorandum of understanding, the curriculum model has been designed to "look and feel different to students' previous learning

experiences", and will draw on work by awarding body chief examiners – AQA and Edexcel – Ofsted commentary on maths resit classes, and Department for Education assessment objectives.

Additionally, best practice in maths revision from the National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics and "common exam pitfalls" have been built into the scheme of work.

The EEF said, for example, that "topic muddles are a theme...as students commonly muddle up mean, median and mode, the 5Rs keeps them well apart in their revision".

A spokesperson added that "area and perimeter are also commonly muddled so are split apart in the scheme of work, and area is revised of all shapes, including circles, and then perimeter and circumference are revised together".

The AoC's senior policy manager for 14-19, Catherine Sezen, said the project will "introduce students to alternative methods for undertaking common but tricky calculations".

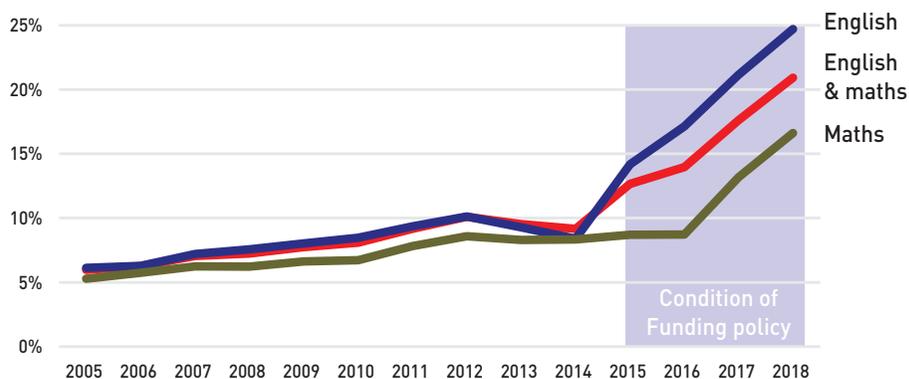
GCSE resits have been a sore point for the sector since the government introduced the condition of funding rule in 2014.

It mandates colleges must help students who failed to achieve a pass (grade C/4 or above) to retake their GCSEs

Catherine Sezen



% who had not passed GCSE English and maths at 16 but had by age 19



in maths or English, or else risk losing funding.

The rule has reaped some rewards: the proportion and number of students achieving both GCSEs after age 16 has more than doubled, from nine per cent (21,721) in 2014 to 21 per cent (46,886) in 2018, according to *FE Week* analysis from May.

However, DfE data from October revealed the number of people aged 17 or above who took maths GCSE in 2017-18 fell by 7,000 to 160,519, and of those, just 22.6 per cent achieved at least a grade 4, down from 25.4 per cent the year before.

EEF's deputy chief executive Stephen Fraser said it was "clear that simply keeping those teenagers in compulsory education for another year – putting extra pressure on an already squeezed sector – is just not enough".

"We have to get more and better evidence about which teaching and learning

strategies work for 16-18 year olds if we want to give all young people the skills they need to thrive in life," he added.

"The 5Rs programme we're funding aims to improve attainment by using diagnostic tests to identify the areas that students need extra support in."

A provider can apply to take part in the scheme if they have a minimum of 15 learners, aged 16-19, who are retaking GCSE maths in 2018-19 and expect these numbers to stay constant, or increase, in 2019-20.

Providers have until July 31 to apply for the trial, with the project expected to run between October 2019 and summer 2020, with a report due out in July 2021.

Up to 80 students at each provider will be involved in the trials, and up to five teachers from each will receive training in the method and theory behind the approach, and attend a catch-up session later in the year.

Text message trials to boost results and cut dropout rates

FRASER WHIELDON
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Can texting improve GCSE English and maths results for learners aged 16-18?

That's what the Education Endowment Fund, social purpose company the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT), and social researchers NatCen are trying to find out.

BIT is running a trial at 32 colleges involving around 3,750 students, where 35 texts are sent to students resitting GCSE English and maths and their study supporter (a peer, parent, or mentor) over the course of a year.

These texts consist of course content; academic resources, such as practice websites; notifications about coursework deadlines; details of extra tutorial sessions; and exam dates.

Students have been randomly placed into groups with one of four conditions: 1) student receives text messages; 2) study supporter receives text messages; 3) both student and

supporter receive text messages; and 4) a "business-as-usual" control group, which receives no texts.

An example of a text message to a student supporter reads: "Hi Richard, last week Asiya learned about the mean, median, and mode. Why not ask her to explain the differences between these terms? If she needs some extra help, here's some extra information: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/topics/zv6pyrd> #SUCCESS".

One teacher from a south London college who took part in the trial said: "I've heard a number of students mention talking to and getting support from their parents this year, which doesn't normally happen. So the texts messages are definitely making an impact."

Success of the trial, which is being evaluated by NatCen, will be judged against the percentage of the students who pass their GCSE maths or English exams after one year.

Information on attendance, the percentage of students taking exams, and student attitudes to learning will also be collected.

Study supporters will also submit

information to assess how the nature of the relationship moderates any impact of the texting.

Ben Lethbridge, head of growth at BIT, said: "By working closely with each college we were able to create a bespoke programme of messages to suit each student's academic year. This trial completed last year and Natcen are currently evaluating the results."

A similar study was run in 2015 by the Behavioural Research Centre for Adult Skills and Knowledge (ASK), on behalf of BIT, involving nearly 2,000 learners aged 19 and above at nine colleges, who were studying courses with entry requirements below level 2 for English and maths.

Half the students were sent texts, half of them were not, and those that were sent texts increased their day-to-day attendance rates by seven per cent.

Meanwhile, the proportion of students who quit courses and never returned was 36 per cent higher among learners who did not receive the texts.

The director of ASK, Zhi Soon, said at the



time the figures were "very encouraging" and that more encouraging texts had been sent out during the holidays, as that is when dropout rates are higher than usual.

At the time, Joyce Black, assistant director for development and research at the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, said: "Any interventions that providers use to support increased retention of learners on programmes are always a good thing. We know that many providers use such interventions regularly."

"We hope that their continued attendance has helped them to grow in confidence, changed their attitude to learning and to achieve their potential."

The evaluation report for the BIT trial will be published in autumn 2019.

fully functional.

NCFE's campaign to create a level playing field for English and maths.

NCFE's purpose is to create opportunities for success to enrich society. When it comes to English and maths we believe that equal opportunities aren't given to all qualification types. There isn't currently a level playing field for English and maths and we want to raise awareness of this issue and make a change to ensure that learners are given the opportunity to take the qualifications that are best for them.

our ask.

We're looking to the government to give English and maths alternative qualifications parity of esteem with GCSEs.

At present, any young person (aged between 16 and 18), who achieves a D (grade 3) in their GCSEs has to re-sit their GCSE exam until they pass. They are unable to do an alternative equivalent qualification (eg Functional Skills) and this legislation is applied through funding. If learners get a grade E then they are permitted to do an alternative so the scope is narrow but the impact is large.

For those young people impacted, this repetitive resitting of exams that they're unlikely to pass leads to a cycle of failure. Currently, only 1 in 4 learners will achieve a higher grade in their re-sit. This means that if 300,000 have to re-sit after getting a grade 3, only around 75,000 will achieve a pass, impacting confidence and prohibiting progression.

With this in mind, we would like the government to reverse the funding rule which states that full time students who have prior attainment of a grade 3 / D in GCSE or equivalent in maths and/or English must study a GCSE to meet the condition of funding with no option of an alternative or stepping stone qualification. We believe this will cater for different styles of learning and open up opportunities.

our survey says.

We surveyed 2000 people across Britain to find out the general public's view on English and maths qualifications.

using english and maths in the 'real world'.

Functional Skills qualifications equip learners with the practical skills needed for everyday tasks in both life and work.

Two thirds (68%) of people think that English and maths qualifications should be easily applied to everyday life with 71% arguing that students should be able to learn in a style that suits them.



our awareness of mental health and stress is improving – however exam stress isn't.

Our survey results showed the damaging impact that exam stress can have on students' mental health, with 70% of respondents at school feeling pressure to re-sit their core GCSEs (this includes English and maths) if they failed first time. Additionally, over half of respondents (53%) who are currently doing their GCSEs said that this is the most stressful time of their teenage years.



learning isn't one size fits all.

We live in a world that offers us more choice than ever before, so why can't we apply this to basic qualifications and skills? **68% of respondents** think that students should be given the options to take alternative exams other than GCSEs.

join the conversation.

Let your voice be heard and have your say on social media, using #FullyFunctional to join the wider conversation!

Visit our website to find out more about the Fully Functional campaign.

 @NCFE #FullyFunctional

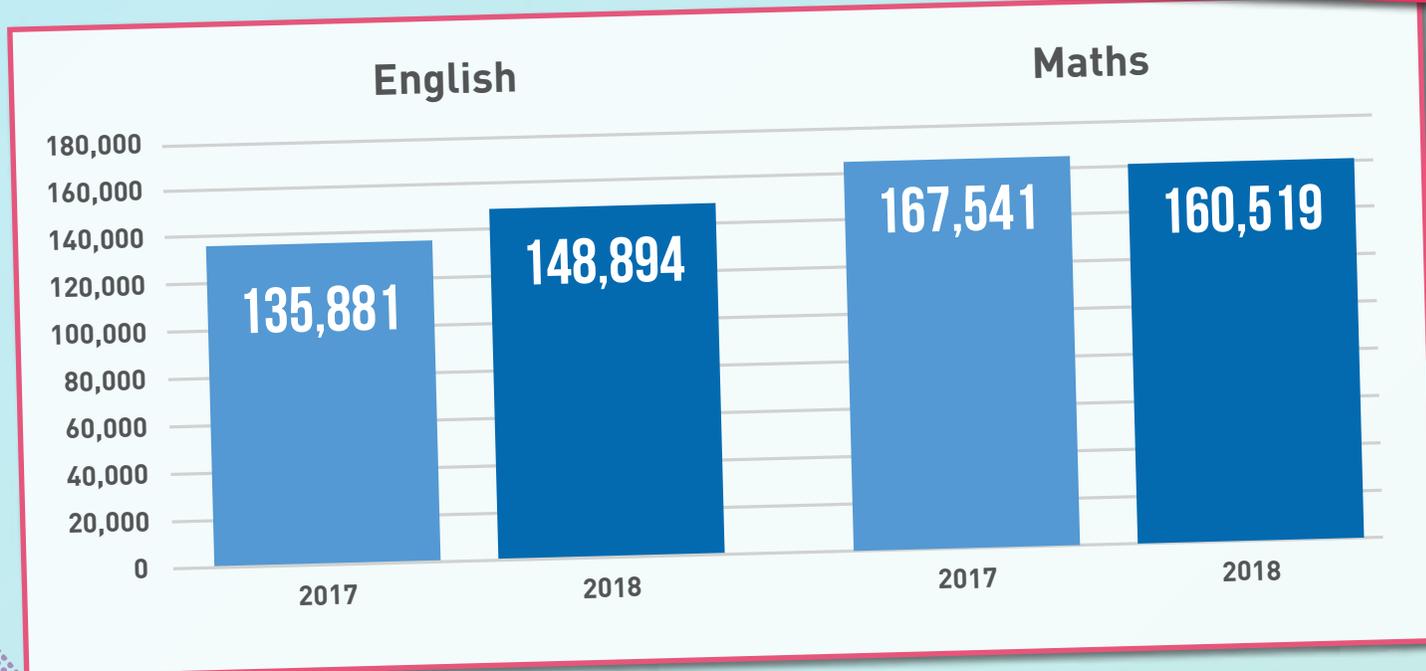
 ncfe.org.uk/fully-functional

 englishandmaths@ncfe.org.uk

English and maths participation:

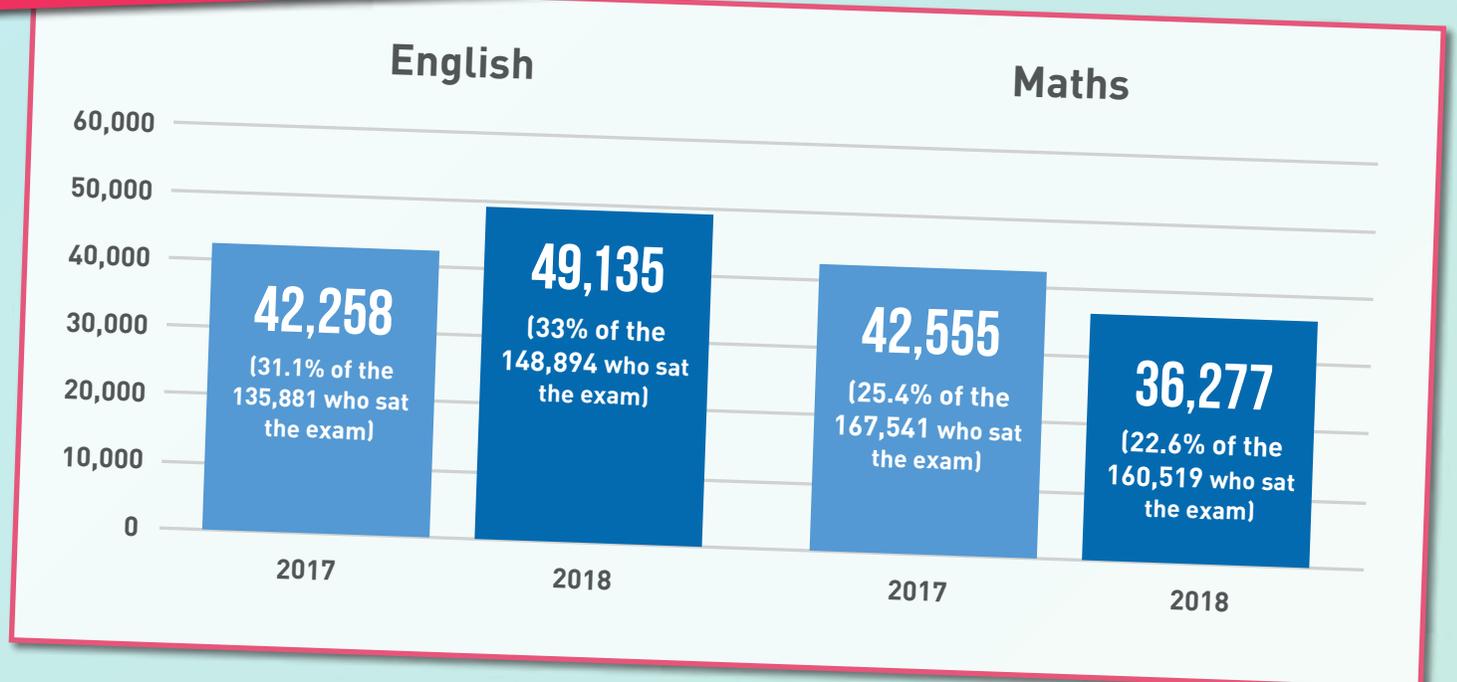
Number of 17+ learners who sat maths and English GCSEs in June 2017 and June 2018

JCQ – Provisional GCSE (Full Course) Results (A*-G Only) - June 2018¹ (All UK Candidates - aged 17 and over)



Number of 17+ learners who got 9 to 4 (or A* to C) for maths and English GCSEs in June 2018

JCQ – Provisional GCSE (Full Course) Results (A*-G Only) - June 2018¹ (All UK Candidates - aged 17 and over)



What do the numbers tell us?

Table showing number of 19+ learners participating in English and maths course by level

Further education and skills: March 2019 main tables

| | 2015/16 | 2016/17 | 2017/18 |
|---------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| English entry level | 79,400 | 73,700 | 80,400 |
| English level 1 | 240,200 | 206,600 | 146,200 |
| English level 2 | 284,400 | 268,500 | 235,900 |
| Maths entry level | 58,100 | 59,100 | 67,300 |
| Maths level 1 | 245,500 | 215,000 | 146,200 |
| Maths level 2 | 279,200 | 271,800 | 235,900 |
| ESOL entry level | 93,000 | 96,000 | 96,200 |
| ESOL level 1 | 15,700 | 16,200 | 16,600 |
| ESOL level 2 | 5,700 | 5,700 | 5,600 |

Table showing number of 19+ learner achievements in English and maths course by level

Further education and skills: March 2019 main tables

| | 2015/16 | 2016/17 | 2017/18 |
|---------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| English entry level | 60,800 | 56,900 | 63,700 |
| English level 1 | 110,800 | 92,000 | 88,500 |
| English level 2 | 101,700 | 89,600 | 87,400 |
| Maths entry level | 45,300 | 47,400 | 54,800 |
| Maths level 1 | 118,000 | 102,800 | 96,600 |
| Maths level 2 | 98,500 | 90,100 | 90,800 |
| ESOL entry level | 78,200 | 81,900 | 84,000 |
| ESOL level 1 | 12,800 | 13,500 | 14,200 |
| ESOL level 2 | 4,800 | 5,000 | 4,800 |

CORRIE HARRIS

Vice principal, Bedford College Group



Great results from our pilot using OU's OpenLearn platform

Corrie Harris describes an ongoing digital initiative to bridge the gap between distance learning and localised learning

Bedford College Group has worked in collaboration with the Open University and two other partner colleges, West Herts and Middlesbrough, to develop and deliver a unique functional skills programme aimed at helping adults progress in employment or enter new occupations through skills training.

The functional skills courses are available on the Open University's digital learning platform, OpenLearn, and offer a free, flexible way for adults to really improve their basic skills and their future prospects.

The pilot, which has been funded by the Department for Education's (DfE) flexible

learning fund and comes to an end in July, has seen some phenomenal results.

Bedford College Group has embraced the project and in return has seen considerable uptake from adult students who have accessed the courses via our network of learning centres across local communities in Northamptonshire and Bedfordshire.

It is apparent that there is a huge need to provide adults with opportunities to learn flexibly and these courses have allowed them to do just that. Functional skills are a part of the core skills needed in everyday life and work and completion of these courses have helped adults to gain the further skills in maths and English needed to progress.

Just as important is the impact on students' self-confidence and self-worth,

which is considerably enhanced; many of our students have reported in a feedback survey that they are now "looking positively to the future and have a new focus to aim for greater achievement".

Over 600 adults accessed the courses via the OpenLearn platform in the Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire regions in a five-month period, our statistics show. Additionally these online courses have been invaluable for our apprentices, who have used them as a learning resource.

In the UK alone there have been over 16,000 unique visitors accessing the course websites. Additionally, more than 4,000 have accessed the materials in the United States, India, the Russian Federation and Brazil between January and May 2019.

The project was launched with the aim of reaching 30,000 adult learners and, given the progress so far, this seems a realistic target.

The partner organisations are now launching subject-specific functional skills courses at level 1 in both health and social care and engineering and construction, with level 2 to follow later this month.

It came as no surprise that a recent survey undertaken by Dr Robert Farrow at the Open University, on the perceived barriers and challenges to learning for adults accessing the courses, found that fear of failure and a lack of confidence

ranked high.

There is a definite need and demand for further opportunities to stretch and challenge these diffident learners. A taste of success fuels one's desire to carry on making progress, and this is where we as FE educators can play a major part.

The challenge is to bridge the gap between distance learning and localised learning so that students can learn flexibly, perhaps in the comfort of their own home, but still be supported with their studies.

“ Fear of failure and a lack of confidence ranked high

This will take further creative collaborative thinking but the feedback from our students is that this type of learning opportunity is very much welcomed.

The UK has a long way to go to address the skills gap and this project goes some way to addressing the basics whilst ensuring that adult learners are supported and continue to grow in confidence.

ROSHAN DOUG

Arts policy adviser and education strategist



Three things senior management should bear in mind when recruiting

Education can no longer be sold as leading to a job for life, says Roshan Doug. Good teachers need to understand the issues that lead so many youngsters to underperform

A senior member of staff was once asked to teach a Functional Skills (FS) Maths class. The course tutor asked if he could cope. "Oh yeah, I'll be fine," he replied. "I taught degree level Maths."

The truth is that it's a fallacy to think that because you have advanced subject knowledge you'll be equipped to take on an FS class. Even some senior managers fall into the trap of prioritising qualifications above experience.

In fact, the teaching of FS English and Maths in further education is a relatively skilled job because teaching at this level is more about having an awareness of the ethos and philosophy of FS. The teacher's

confidence in classroom management, interpersonal communication skills and an understanding of their role are vital attributes in making the delivery effective.

So, upon recruiting staff to teach FS, senior management might want to bear in mind the following three areas:

1. Candidates who know what to teach and how to teach it

Interview questions should try and ascertain a candidate's suitability for the role: how they would teach basic skills without patronising or boring young people; make the subject knowledge and skills accessible to young people; try to build a rapport with the class and connect with individuals.

The candidate should also be quizzed on how they would break the course objectives down into manageable segments that would

be digestible for young people, and whether they feel confident about designing a personally tailored teaching programme.

2. Candidates who express empathy

Does the candidate have a good awareness of the socio-political setting in which young people find themselves? Does the potential new recruit know why students fail at school or the possible causes of their disengagement? What is behind the fact that so many of our 16-year-olds (over 100,000 every year, in fact) leave school without functional literacy or numeracy? Is it linked to the politics of teaching and assessment and factors that define these for schools, FE colleges and training providers?

“ Does the potential recruit know the possible causes of students' disengagement?

Also, the candidate needs to understand that young people are bound to direct some resentment and frustration their way, and not take it personally. Having failed at

school after 11 years of formal education, the teacher's presence in the classroom is a perpetual reminder of their failure.

3. Candidates who understand the role of modern education

It is reported that many young people feel disenfranchised because they don't see the purpose of education. If it wasn't for our government's directive to reduce NEET figures (Not in Education, Employment or Training), many of our students would be at home doing very little. Is it the students or our current model of education system that has failed? What incentive is there for their being at college? And, anyway, what are these qualifications worth if young people believe that there are no decent well-paid jobs?

These are pertinent questions and concerns and by addressing them, the teacher is more likely to be in tune with the students.

My generation was sold the narrative that if you did well in education you could get a job for life and retire on a good pension. The job market and the nature of our global economy have changed drastically in the last 30 years, so that it is no longer feasible to talk about a job for life.

The FS teacher needs to give young people a sense of worth and a belief in the very system that has (perhaps unfairly) failed them. This requires someone with a real awareness of their role in the classroom and the wider sphere of education.

The Manchester College pilots ‘nuanced’, non-computerised diagnostic assessments

JESSICA FINO
JESSICA.FINO@FEWEEK.CO.UK

One of the largest colleges in the country has pioneered a new way of assessing GCSE English students in its bid to drive up results.

The Assess For Success programme was developed by The Manchester College and co-funded by the Education Endowment Foundation and the bank JP Morgan in 2017.

Instead of getting new students to sit computerised diagnostic assessments (used by almost all providers), the college developed its own “more nuanced” assessment of skills, based on short, handwritten exercises.

Complemented by ongoing “bite-size” assessments focusing on particular skill areas, and professional development to support teachers to use the assessments to inform their teaching, the approach “aims to focus teachers’ and learners’ efforts on the areas they most need to develop, thereby improving confidence and outcomes”.

The assessments feed into a review tool that “captures the students’ English skills, but also their attitudes and confidence, allowing tutors to easily see how their learners are progressing”.

The idea followed the large increase in the number of 16-18-year-old students needing to re-take GCSE courses, The Manchester College said, and their “limited progress and lack of motivation” after failing at school.

According to government data, of the 148,894 people aged 17 or over who sat an English GCSE exam in 2017-18, only 33 per cent achieved a grade 4 or above.

Gill Scott, project lead and group quality manager at The Manchester College, argued that “long-established online assessment tools, previously used en masse to assess students, are not fit-for-purpose for a handwritten exam and potentially undermine teacher professionalism in using assessment, particularly for planning learning from the student’s starting point”.

The approach was initially launched on the college’s main campus, reaching over 900 learners. It has since engaged with

3,000 learners across six other colleges, who have been encouraged to adapt and trial an assessment toolkit in the context of their own delivery of GCSE English in their college.

Colleges were expected to put forward either all or a proportion of their English teaching staff to attend the training and adopt the approaches.

An independent evaluation report carried out by the Behavioural Insights Team will be published in 2021.

Two years after its launch, Scott said “carefully constructed diagnostic assessments and progress assessments”, designed and marked by teachers, make clear to students the progress they are making and what specific skills they need to learn.

“It is too early to state the impact on GCSE but the impact on Functional Skills has been significant, with very high achievement across all levels,” Scott said.

She added that, on GCSE resits, the college faces the challenge of balancing exam preparation with the need to develop underpinning knowledge and skills, particularly students at the lower end of



Gill Scott

grade 3.

“Early indicators are that a knowledge and skills approach is improving student motivation and confidence.”

Manchester College hopes the project will make students “clear on what they need to learn, and take more responsibility for their learning” and that teachers will “assess more accurately and effectively plan learning from known starting points to accelerate progress”.

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a great addition.



NCFE Level 3 Certificate in Mathematics for Everyday Life (Core Maths)

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Practical in nature, this qualification is a versatile A level alternative, eligible for both UCAS and performance points as well as being suitable for use within Study Programmes.

Interested?

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Summer school offers fast track for adult learners

JESSICA FINO

JESSICA.FINO@FEWEEK.CO.UK

South Essex College has launched a new initiative to drive its English and maths adult offering by creating intensive summer courses.

The Summer School for Adults was introduced this academic year and follows an expansion of its adult English and maths provision that, according to the college, has tripled in size over the past three years.

Joanne Styles, the college's manager of English and maths, told *FE Week* that if the course is successful and learners achieve in the time-frame, the adult provision will look to introduce similar courses in the next academic year.

She explained that the college has expanded its functional skills offering to adults at all levels, alongside GCSE qualifications. While the GCSE courses run in the daytime, the evening sessions and the timetable are designed to fit around other courses adult learners may be undertaking in the college, and any childcare and employment commitments they may have.

"Decreasing the amount of time to complete a course has become important. It not only helps with retention of learners



but it also helps meet learners' needs," she explained.

"Many of the adult learners have childcare and career commitments and often want to complete something quickly and then move on."

According to Styles, the courses are more intensive and with content delivered over three days over three weeks. An element of distance learning will also be incorporated, with learners expected to access and work on digital resources at home and in advance of lessons.

"The Summer School will enable learners who may not have achieved a grade, or only recently made a decision about a course, to meet the entry requirements required to start in time for September," Styles said.

"These courses are equally helpful to adult learners looking to improve their literacy and numeracy skills and to support their children at school or college."

Stress-busting yoga and mindfulness trialled for students facing resits

JESSICA FINO

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A college has started offering yoga and mindfulness classes to students in the run-up to the English and maths GCSE resits season, in a bid to combat stress.

After an initial taster session, West Suffolk College plans to offer the classes on a weekly basis throughout the year and will expand it to all students.

Kim Havercroft, who is an established yoga teacher outside her administrative job at the college, suggested to her manager she could offer the classes to help students deal with stress, depression and anxiety when approaching the tests.

"There is a lot that yoga can do in terms of calming techniques, breathing and clearing the mind before an exam," she said.

"There are breathing techniques that can have an immediate effect in calming. You can take an in-breath to the count of three seconds, hold it for four seconds, retain it, and exhale for five seconds. A long exhale promotes a calming effect, and the breath relaxes you."

The yoga classes are conducted in the college's

air-conditioned dance studio, which has lighting that can be dimmed to set the mood.

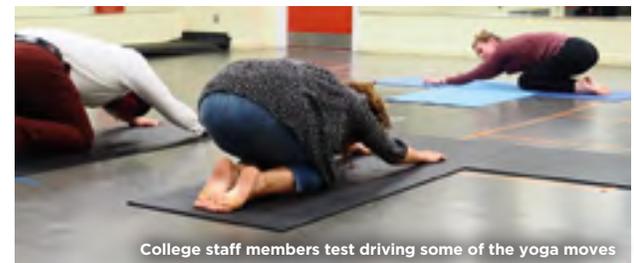
Rachel Boast, director of maths and English at West Suffolk College, said students sitting the GCSE resit programme are, "by virtue of having failed before, more nervous and anxious about their exams than the traditional GCSE student".

"We have to work hard to overcome significant barriers in terms of confidence and self-belief to support them to do their best," she explained.

Alongside the yoga sessions, the college also practised various mindfulness (a form of meditation) and visualisation techniques in the classroom in the lead-up to the exams.

"We needed students to visualise their success, to overcome their feelings of negativity and failure from before," Boast said.

"As Einstein said: 'If you believe that you can, or if you believe that you can't, then you are probably right.'"



College staff members test driving some of the yoga moves

STELLA DUDZIC

Programme Leader (Curriculum and Resources),
Mathematics in Education and Industry (MEI)



Charity testing new GCSE maths curriculum for resits policy

Applying maths in realistic, everyday scenarios could be the way to re-energise teaching and learning for the 16-19 cohort, says Stella Dudzic

It's great that college staff are working hard to help students achieve success in resitting GCSE mathematics but most students who don't have a standard pass at age 16 still don't have one at 19. Repeated resits of the same qualification can be demotivating for students and this may deter them from further engagement with learning and from using maths in the future.

It's clear that it's time for a rethink of relevant mathematical content and qualifications for GCSE resit students, in line with the recommendations of Professor Sir Adrian Smith's review of mathematics education for 16- to 18-year-olds in England.

At Mathematics in Education and Industry (MEI) we are developing a new maths curriculum for post-16 GCSE resit students, with a greater emphasis on applying maths in realistic contexts. The project is funded by the Nuffield Foundation.

Part of our early work has been to review qualifications that are equivalent to GCSE and suitable for our target student cohort. Although qualifications in the UK are now all based on exams at the end of the course (linear), in the past we used to have some run as modules, such as AQA Level 1/Level 2 Certificate in Use of Mathematics and SEG Modular Mathematics (mature GCSE).

The current maths GCSE requires students to take all the exam papers at the same exam period. Modular qualifications enable students to achieve success in part of the qualification before progressing

further. Many of the linear qualifications we considered, such as Functional Skills level 2 and SQA National 5 Applications of Mathematics, have a lower level qualification with a similar title that can be taken as a stepping stone to that qualification. Although, theoretically, Functional Skills level 2 can be used as a stepping stone to GCSE maths, we are not aware of any evidence that it is being successfully used in that way.

Repeated resits can be demotivating and deter further learning

After reviewing the relevant research and consulting a wide range of stakeholders, the following findings are emerging:

- Students who resit GCSE Maths often have gaps in their basic skills.
- The use of maths in everyday life often involves using technology, including online tools such as using loan calculators, and planning journeys using Google Maps.
- The ability to apply simple maths in complex situations is more important for employability than knowing a lot of maths.

- Confidence and motivation are important.

It is important that students who resit GCSE Mathematics gain a useful qualification and that they can use maths in the range of contexts they are likely to encounter. So what should numerate adults be able to do? Make a rough estimate when splitting a restaurant bill is important. Deciding whether they can afford all the things they want to buy in the supermarket is another basic requirement.

Other important skills for life and work should include being able to: use a tape measure correctly; tell the time from analogue and digital clocks; convert measurements between different units, and understand how interest rates for loans and savings work.

A discussion with our project advisory group about linking teaching in FE colleges to "British values" resulted in adding the need to understand election results and opinion polls to our list of contexts that students should be able to deal with.

We then turned our attention to the content needed. This is currently being organised using our list of scenarios. This list is also being used to inform the example assessments we are drafting.

What we need now is feedback on our draft proposals from teachers of GCSE resit classes. If you want further information, or if you teach GCSE resit and are willing to give us your views, please get in touch: stella.dudzic@mei.org.uk

MARK DAWE

CEO, AELP



Why everyone should do maths to the age of 18

Mark Dawe presents his concept of “Intent, Implement and Impact” to replace the blind following of the present resits policy

Let’s start with a basic principle for the policymakers: everyone should do maths to the age of 18 as a minimum requirement, no matter what level.

But as the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) has said many times over the past three years, the demotivating, compulsory GCSE retake policy, which results in 120,000 annual failures, should be abandoned. Instead, we should instigate a proper initial assessment that should guide whether or not post-16 learners should still be trying to pass GCSE or doing functional skills instead.

In advocating what is surely a reasonable proposal, I would nevertheless point out that many employers complain that many of those who have passed GCSE maths still can’t do basic percentages, while few complain about the maths of someone who has successfully completed an apprenticeship programme.

Employers complain that many with GCSE maths cannot do basic percentages

I strongly believe that maths, English and digital form the core work skills that vocational education should be addressing, especially when only 60 per cent of school pupils are leaving statutory education with full level 2. But, not surprisingly for a chartered accountant, my view is that functional maths is the most important. Throughout my career, I have campaigned for Core Maths to rectify the appalling situation that we are facing as a result of government’s obsession with academic maths.

The legacy is grim: nine million adults have literacy and maths levels below that of an 11-year-old, so there needs to be a reintroduction of proper funding and support for maths and English for all post-18 learners who require it. Only 21 per cent of parents are proud of their children doing well in maths, compared

with 50 per cent who feel that way about achievement in reading. Parents’ lack of confidence in their own ability in the subject is proving to be a major factor in the lack of support that children receive when doing maths homework.

But there are grounds for optimism. Ofsted has given us a great starting point with the new Education Inspection Framework B and its focus on the quality of education and the curriculum. Data will be provided to inspectors for monitoring purposes, rather than being a large factor in determining the inspection grade outcome. In my view, institutions and providers are leaving themselves open to criticism for not having a learner-focused programme if they are blindly following the resits policy.

Instead they should adopt a policy of “Intent, Implement and Impact”:

- Intent – conduct an initial assessment and plan the appropriate English and maths provision for the individual learner. The initial assessment is now as important as the whole programme.
- Implement – deliver, monitor and be ready to act.
- Impact – record the outcome and progression. It doesn’t have to result in a qualification as long as there is evidence of good progress.

The next thing is that core maths should be a universal requirement for 16-18 year olds. Then, if we recognise that the resits policy is a failure, the government’s Spending Review must address the fact that functional skills within an apprenticeship receive only half the classroom funding rate when the curriculum and assessment is about to become harder.

It is a growing concern that prior attainment of functional skills is a pre-course requirement for some apprenticeships because it acts as a barrier against social mobility. T-levels too will require level 2 maths and English for entry rather than their teaching during the programme. We must also confront the barmy requirement that every apprentice should have to sit level 2 functional skills in a level 2 apprenticeship but without the need to pass.

At the moment, all we are doing is disadvantaging the already disadvantaged, leading to exclusion from decent career prospects. The problems are solvable but we need some plain common sense to sort them out.

STEPHEN EVANS

Chief executive, Learning and Work Institute



A three-point plan to boost basic skills acquisition

Literacy and numeracy are fundamental building blocks for life and work. We need a much higher ambition for all young people, says Stephen Evans

Literacy, numeracy and other core skills such as digital and financial capability are central to finding work, building a career, managing your finances and engaging in society. And in a world of advancing technology and rising skills demands, this need is only going to increase.

It is deeply troubling, therefore, that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) surveys show that young people in England have poorer literacy and numeracy skills on average than both older people in this country and young people in many other countries. The Youth Commission of the Learning and Work Institute has identified this poor track record as one of five big challenges facing young people.

But there are some positive signs: ten years ago, only five per cent of 16-year-olds who did not achieve “good” GCSE grades in English and maths went on to do so by age 19. Today that figure is 27 per cent, when including functional skills qualifications as well as GCSEs. This increase is largely linked to the introduction of a requirement for young people in further education to continue English and maths learning if they do not have the grades. We should celebrate that success, though of course there is still room for improvement. Also, qualifications do not always equate to skills.

But what about the 160,000 who did not get the grades at age 16 and still fail to do so by age 19? What about all those young people not in further education who still need to improve their basic skills, or the 1.2 million 18-24-year-olds whom the OECD survey suggests lack functional literacy or numeracy?

Learning and Work Institute’s recent Time For Action report argues that doubling the number of people improving their basic skills would be repaid many times over. I would suggest a three-point plan to make this happen.

First, we need more young people engaged in further education to improve their literacy and numeracy alongside other learning. Despite some progress, the proportion of 16-18-year-olds in education remains lower than in many other countries. Similarly,

progress in increasing the proportion of 19-year-olds qualified to level 2 and level 3 has stalled in recent years. The Augar Review recommendations, T-levels and investment in FE will collectively be important in improving matters.

OECD suggests 1.2 million 18-24-year-olds in England lack functional skills

Second, we need a much greater push to improve literacy and numeracy for young people not in education, employment or training. Jobcentre Plus can refer any of the 200,000 young people on out-of-work benefits to training if they think it’s a key barrier to finding work. Why not have a more systemic approach that allows improvement of literacy and numeracy alongside looking for work and continuing learning once in employment?

Third, we need employers to step up, because a good proportion of young people with low literacy and numeracy are in work. Many employers are already focused on this, and of course functional literacy and numeracy form part of apprenticeships. But too few young people take part in apprenticeships. We need to improve uptake and we also need greater access to learning at work beyond apprenticeships.

All of this will require investment and the engagement of young people. We need to inspire them by showing them the difference that improving their literacy and numeracy can make to their lives. It will also require new ways to deliver the teaching of literacy and numeracy both by integrating it into other course content and delivering it in more flexible ways that allow young people to fit learning around work and home life.

The experience of other countries shows it is possible to do far better. The evidence shows this is essential for social mobility, our economy and our society. Time to set our sights high.



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