IfL research to inform the work of the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning

Final report for the Institute for Learning (IfL)

February 2013
About the Institute for Learning (IfL)

IfL is the independent, professional membership body representing teachers, trainers, tutors, assessors, instructors and student teachers in the further education and skills system. Created 11 years ago by FE teachers and trainers, unions and FE employers, IfL has gone back to its roots as a voluntary membership body since regulations requiring registration were revoked in 2012. IfL has a key role to play in helping implement the findings of the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning (CAVTL) and through IfL's partnership with the new FE guild and other organisations in the sector, for example, the 157 Group of colleges, the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) union and others.

Terminology

Throughout this document we use the term “teachers and trainers” or “teachers” to cover all those who directly support learning in further education and skills, including lecturers, teachers, trainers, tutors, assessors, instructors and trainee teachers. We use the terms “colleges” and “learning providers” to cover the range of organisations that provide learning outside schools and higher education.

Glossary of abbreviations and acronyms used in this document

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AELP</td>
<td>Association of Employment and Learning Providers</td>
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<tr>
<td>ATL</td>
<td>Association of Teachers and Lecturers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATLS</td>
<td>Associate Teacher Learning and Skills status, conferred by IfL</td>
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<tr>
<td>BIS</td>
<td>Department for Business, Innovation and Skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPD</td>
<td>continuing professional development</td>
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<tr>
<td>CTLLS</td>
<td>Certificate in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector</td>
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<tr>
<td>DTLLS</td>
<td>Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LLN</td>
<td>literacy, language and numeracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSIS</td>
<td>Learning and Skills Improvement Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>NFER</td>
<td>National Foundation for Educational Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>NRDC</td>
<td>National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTLLS</td>
<td>Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QTLS</td>
<td>Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills status, conferred by IfL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QTS</td>
<td>Qualified Teacher Status (for teaching in schools)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WBL</td>
<td>work-based learning</td>
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The current context for quality improvement in learning and skills

In December 2011, following the Institute for Learning's calls for an independent inquiry into world-class teaching and training in further education and skills, and drawing on Professor Alison Wolf’s March 2011 report, the government announced an independent commission on adult education and vocational pedagogy. This was in a formal response to its New Challenges, New Chances consultation, Further Education and Skills System Reform Plan: Building a World Class Skills System, and it asked IfL and the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) to support and inform the independent commission.

In November 2012, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) announced that its funding for LSIS would cease at the end of the 2012/13 academic year, and LSIS subsequently stated that it would begin a managed exit from its delivery of improvement services for the further education and skills sector.

In a statement published on its website on 31 January 2013, LSIS confirmed that the majority of its work would continue as planned until the end of March 2013, and that a phased ending to its services would take place during the summer term. It also advised that LSIS was working with BIS and partner organisations to ensure that where possible some services and programmes currently provided by LSIS would continue to benefit the sector beyond August 2013 through other routes and organisations.

Throughout this report, there are references to various LSIS support programmes and the uncertainty about whether, in what form, and by which organisations they will be offered after LSIS closes.

IfL pays tribute to LSIS for its work with the sector to help improve standards by commissioning products and services; identifying and sharing good practice throughout the sector; and delivering tailored programmes of support.

IfL is committed to working as a key partner to support the new guild led by the Association of Colleges (AoC) and the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP), and to helping build upon the good work done by LSIS.

As the independent professional body with a large individual membership, IfL will continue to support individual teachers and trainers in distinctive ways that complement and extend the activities of individual FE employers the new FE employer-led guild.

1 Press notices: 20 October 2010, IfL calls for independent inquiry. [www.ifl.ac.uk/newsandevents/press-releases/ifl-calls-for-independent-inquiry](http://www.ifl.ac.uk/newsandevents/press-releases/ifl-calls-for-independent-inquiry); 19 November 2010, Professionalism is key to skills strategy, says IfL. [www.ifl.ac.uk/newsandevents/press-releases/professionalism-is-key-to-skills-strategy,-says-ifl](http://www.ifl.ac.uk/newsandevents/press-releases/professionalism-is-key-to-skills-strategy,-says-ifl)


3 In February 2013, IfL’s membership stood at more than 75,000.
Executive summary

The Institute for Learning (IfL) originally called for an independent commission in 2010 and was pleased to be asked by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) to work alongside the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) to support and inform the independent Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning, set up by the government following the publication of the skills strategy, *New Challenges, New Chances* (BIS, December 2011).

In phase one, IfL invited members to volunteer to produce a written account of their vocational teaching and training practice, linked to the key issues in promoting vocational education known about from previous research. They were also asked to attend one of a number of regional seminars, to debate the issues further.

The outcome of this first phase of research was a preliminary report (June 2012), after which IfL was asked to carry out further work on two emerging themes:

- the effective delivery of functional skills in English and maths in vocational programmes
- effective practice in partnerships between employers and vocational learning providers.

To do this, the researchers carried out desk research and held telephone interviews with practitioners and others in a position to speak knowledgeably about these issues. They also visited a number of education providers and employers to gain a closer understanding of the issues facing them. As a result, this second report is able to provide the Commission with both general insights and illustrative case studies of current practice.

The effective delivery of functional skills in English and maths in vocational programmes

As a country, we have struggled to provide all citizens with an adequate foundation of basic skills for personal, social and professional purposes. The focus on “functional skills” is just the latest attempt to achieve this.

The barriers to successful development of English and maths by very many learners include the following:

- Lack of commitment by some leaders of vocational learning to take the development of all learners’ English and maths seriously. They may be more focused on funding units than on the quality of learning; they may focus more on shorter-term vocational learning outcomes than longer-term development of the foundations of functional skills as part of lifelong learning; they may devolve decisions to managers without a clarity of vision and priority for functional skills and with patchy results.

- The departmental structures of many vocational learning providers can make cross-curricular initiatives, including the development of functional skills, difficult. Team working by teachers and trainers within departments may be difficult; team working across departments may be even more difficult to achieve. Yet, as this report shows, team working has long been recognised as essential to the effective delivery of functional skills in English and maths in vocational programmes.

- The number of hours available to teach functional skills (typically 30 guided learning hours) is considered insufficient, especially to compensate for many years of schooling that failed to develop English and maths to a sufficiently high standard to meet a learner’s needs. According to a recent study (BIS, 2011), in order for learners to make significant progress tutors need in excess of 100 hours.

- The Wolf report, quite rightly, pointed to weaknesses in the conception and practicability of functional skills; however, all the evidence for this and previous reports shows the important motivating power of embedding English and maths in vocational programmes. It is important not to lose this.

- What is needed is sufficient professional development of staff to deliver functional skills. Some providers are doing this in order to raise staff expertise. More needs to be done, but there is uncertainty about the future of the LSIS English and maths support programme.

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4 The term “adult” in this report refers to young adults of 16–25, as well as to more mature learners.
5 The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), 2011. *New Challenges, New Chances*.
The evidence of this research is that the successful implementation of functional skills requires the following:

- **Committed leadership by senior managers and employers to take the skills seriously enough to create a culture and operational systems that make successful implementation possible.**

- **Genuine teamwork between functional skills specialists and vocational tutors to share an element of discrete provision and vocational embedding, with time protected for this.**

- **Adequate initial training and in-service professional development of functional skills specialists, and of all vocational tutors in functional skills, so that they may play their part in helping learners to practise functional skills.**

Unless these things can be put in place, there is no possibility of providing a foundation for vocational learning that will enable enough learners to progress to level 3 and beyond, to meet their personal ambitions and the economic needs of the country.

**What can the Commission do to help?**

The evidence of this and previous research all points to the key features of effective provision of functional skills listed above. Anything that the Commission can do to boost the development and maintenance of these key features is to be welcomed.

**Effective practice in partnerships between employers and vocational learning providers**

The relationships between large companies and vocational learning providers are often quite different from those of small and medium-sized companies. Large companies may train their own staff or require bespoke training from providers. SMEs may see their local provider as the ‘font of all knowledge’, with a key role in supporting business progression.

Partnerships, where they exist in any significant sense, are usually based on mutual self-interest. Businesses may provide training providers with resources if they see a direct benefit to their staff, but altruism is rare.

Similarly, if vocational tutors are to keep up to date in their skill, they and their employers must take the initiative. It is the role of the vocational learning provider to support the continuing professional development (CPD) of tutors and ensure the quality of their provision. However, no evidence was found of a provider that routinely sends vocational tutors into industry for updating and it appears that the sector has become highly dependent on individual professionalism when there should be a shared commitment.

The most effective employer engagement is found where providers have a whole-organisation approach, applying the strengths of individuals in different roles to employer engagement where they can have the most impact.

When engaged with appropriately, a company may recognise that its language and culture are understood and appreciated and the provider may become a partner, rather than just a service.

Local connections through, for example, staff and chambers of commerce, are seen as absolutely necessary to engage with SMEs. Some providers have become better at engaging employers, and some have set up studio schools and other more employment-focused forms of provision. So there is good practice out there.

The most difficulty is found in engaging employers in curriculum development or delivery and in simulating a working environment in colleges.

The evidence of this research is that effective partnership working between employers and vocational learning providers requires the following:

- **Good leadership of learning providers, to take employer engagement seriously, and all the implications of this in terms of the currency of vocational tutors, and the relevance to employers’ needs of what is offered.**

- **Organisational systems that make good use of staff to engage with employers in appropriate ways.**

- **Ensuring that vocational teachers have time for partnership working with employers because as specialists they are best placed to lead specialist curriculum development in the vocational area.**

- **Ensuring sufficient opportunities for vocational tutors’ CPD so that employers can have confidence in the standards of delivery and that they are up to date in their vocational field.**

**General conclusions**

The two issues addressed in this paper – the development of functional skills; and employer-provider partnerships in vocational learning – are interrelated.

Effective practice in both requires good leadership – to create the culture and the impetus to form partnerships, whether between education providers and employers, or between functional skills specialists and vocational tutors. Partnerships are built on mutual self-interest; trust established over time by working together; and a willingness to learn by mistakes to move the common endeavour forward.
Individuals need adequate levels of English and maths in order to study, especially beyond level 3; employers need staff who have adequate levels of English and maths at least at level 2 to work effectively. And the country needs to continue to build a highly skilled workforce, able to attract investment and compete in international markets.

Companies, especially SMEs, need the help of education and training providers to keep their staff up to date; training providers need employers to send staff for training and keep them in business. Providers also need the help of employers to update vocational tutors’ skills, and to provide suitable work placements for learners.

So there is a lot of mutual self-interest in forming partnerships – what is sometimes lacking is the leadership to make this happen. Because partnerships do not just happen – they are consciously built, over time, by leaders who see the need and work towards meeting it.

The leaders best placed to form partnerships are the senior managers of colleges, many of whom already take this role seriously. The LSIS Principals Qualifying Programme (which became the Executive Leadership Development Programme, to encompass leadership of work-based providers) did, among other things, address how leaders are outward-facing towards employers and communities, as well as inward-facing; and how they lead in learning, such as developing functional skills, as well as in controlling resources. Sadly, the requirement to take the programme ended in June 2010, but it did have the potential to raise the quality of leadership in the sector and this was recognised by Ofsted.

Similarly, the future is not known of the LSIS English and maths support programme, which, as respondents to this research attested, has done much to help providers deliver functional skills effectively. The Commission may wish to consider, post-LSIS, how leadership within the sector may be developed; and how particular initiatives, such as the development of functional skills, may be supported.

As this report shows, there is good practice in the sector, both in developing functional skills and in employer-provider engagement; however, this good practice is patchy. Ofsted’s annual report for 2011/12\(^8\) showed that there are sectoral weaknesses to address and that, in particular, high levels of leadership are needed to address these.

Markets may contribute to driving down costs and improving efficiency; however, whether they alone can deliver good quality public services is debatable. If colleges recognise a social duty in a deprived area, as exemplified in case study 1, that duty may transcend straightforward cost-benefit economics. The preliminary report to the Commission mentioned that it may make no commercial sense for an SME to train staff if it can poach from another company, yet for the country as a whole training makes good, commercial sense. As seen in the way that many vocational tutors will keep up to date in their own time if they can, acting out of pride in their skills, public servants do often act in ways that transcend market forces.

Beyond market forces, it remains to be seen what catalysts will exist to ensure that vocational training providers transcend sectoral and sectarian boundaries to forge mutually beneficial partnerships with local communities and employers, and across college departments, to develop functional skills. Partnership working requires leaders with the vision and the energy to create operational systems that make teamwork and partnership possible, and that make good use of the main resource of any learning provider – people. Creating and sustaining partnerships requires protected time and a proper value and status given to this activity, including active involvement of vocational teachers. Professional development of staff is needed to help them support learners; work in teams to deliver functional skills; engage with employers; and keep up to date in vocational specialist areas and effective practice.

Leadership is essential to accomplish this; but leaders too need support and possibly some training about what to lead and how. Managing resources is not the same as leadership, which needs courage, vision, and a willingness to take measured risks – qualities that some leaders already display.

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Introduction

The Institute for Learning (IfL) was asked by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) to work alongside the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) to support and inform the independent commission on Adult Vocational Learning, set up in response to New Challenges, New Chances (BIS, December 2011).

In phase one, IfL invited members to volunteer to produce a written account of their practice, linked to the key issues in promoting vocational learning and teaching known about from previous research. They were also asked to attend one of a number of regional seminars, to debate the issues further.

In total, 120 members drawn from across the vocational learning spectrum, including teachers, trainers and assessors from colleges, private training providers, prisons, and the military, submitted written evidence. Seventy-eight of the respondents also attended one of six regional seminars, where they discussed the key issues and other topics they considered important to improving adult vocational learning.

At three of the venues, seminars with 26 learners were also held. Additionally, 35 IfL members took part in a Policy Review TV symposium, either remotely or in person. The Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) also discussed the issues and provided feedback, and BIS and LSIS attended one of the seminars.

The outcome of this first phase of research was a preliminary report (June 2012), after which IfL was asked to carry out further work on two emerging themes:

- the effective delivery of functional skills in English and maths in vocational programmes
- effective practice in partnerships between employers and vocational learning providers.

To do this, the researchers carried out desk research and held telephone interviews with people in a position to speak knowledgeably about these issues, including teachers and trainers. They also visited a number of education providers and employers to gain a closer understanding of the issues facing them (see appendix 1 for an acknowledgement list).

As a result, this second report is able to provide the Commission with both general insights and illustrative case studies of current practice.

9 The term “adult” in this report refers to young adults of 16–25, as well as to more mature learners.

10 Harkin, J. 2012. IfL preparatory research to inform the work of the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning. London: IfL.
The effective delivery of functional skills in English and maths in vocational programmes: phase 1 summary

Summary of the key points raised in the IfL preliminary report

- Most vocational tutors acknowledge that it is important to embed the development of English – and to a lesser extent maths – in vocational learning. Embedding motivates learners in ways that more generic approaches, such as GCSE English and maths, often fail to do.

- Embedding, for many vocational tutors, means teaching by stealth, disguising the functional skills – this carries a strong possibility that the skills disappear altogether.

- While embedding by vocational tutors may cover the level of functional skill needed to cope with the current course, it may be insufficient to equip the learner to progress to a higher level – and what the country needs is level 3 skills and beyond.

- Team teaching is needed if vocational tutors are to successfully embed functional skills – but team approaches are rarely in evidence.

- Vocational tutors need adequate initial and in-service training to deliver functional skills, especially to learners who have failed to develop the skills during 11 years or more of compulsory schooling.

In order to support the effective delivery of functional skills in vocational learning, senior managers must take the need seriously, so that adequate systems of professional development and team-based support are put in place.

Issues that the national Commission on Adult Vocational Learning may wish to consider further

- What can be done to help vocational teachers and trainers build on the widespread acceptance that they have a personal, professional responsibility to help develop skills in the use of English, maths and science, as appropriate to the vocational area and level of qualification?

  There is an almost universal agreement that embedding of English, maths and science within vocational qualifications is good practice.

- How may this endeavour best be supported so that embedding leads to real progress in learners’ skills?

- What role in this do awarding and other national bodies have?

- How should English, maths and science specialists be integrated into vocational subject teams, to give support to staff and to learners, as needed?

- Are syllabuses fit for purpose in supporting these endeavours? In particular, and in light of the Wolf report (2011), do functional skills need to be reviewed?

- What are the root causes of poor basic skills and should there be a cross-sectoral study of this issue?

- Are all vocational teachers confident and competent in English and maths at least to level 2, as an absolute minimum prerequisite?
Phase 2: The effective delivery of functional skills in English and maths in vocational programmes

This study gives a relatively brief account of the background to functional skills and the challenges faced by the FE sector in implementing them. This is accomplished in two parts – the first will provide essential background to understanding the endeavour to raise levels of English and maths; the second part will provide a number of illustrative case studies of practice to orientate the Commission’s thinking about possible ways forward for the sector.

Part 1: The background to functional skills

As the IfL preparatory report (June, 2012) pointed out, the endeavour in Britain to develop sufficiently high levels of English for personal and professional purposes is very long-standing. Both the Newbolt report (1921)\(^{11}\) and the Kingman report (1988)\(^{12}\) recognised that English does not do well in a scramble for place and prestige in the vocational curriculum and is too easily marginalised.

The inevitable result is illiteracy that is handed down through the generations, to the detriment of individuals, employers and the economy. Kingman held that all teachers should be trained to have an adequate understanding of language; and that there should be a coordinated policy for language development in all educational establishments. As the levels of skills needed by a modern economy become more sophisticated, this problem has deepened.

The Confederation of British Industry report, *Towards a Skills Revolution* (1989)\(^{13}\) and the parallel Trades Union Congress report, *Skills 2000* (1989)\(^{14}\) both called for the development of a range of generic or common skills, including English and maths, perceived to be needed in employment. In response, the secretary of state for education (Baker, 1989) instructed curriculum agencies (NCC, 1989; NCVQ, 1989) to produce reports on the development of core skills (renamed ‘key skills’ following the Dearing report, 1997\(^{15}\)).

It was proposed that these skills should not be bolted on to existing curricula but integrated so that learners experience and develop them in real contexts of use.

The Further Education Unit (1993) recommended that in order to develop core skills there should be institutional management of change; systematic planning and development of the curriculum; learner participation and action planning; the provision of a range of learning opportunities; and regular structured time to review and assess the skills. The recommendations were largely ignored (Harkin, 2000).

The Moser report (DfE, 1999)\(^{16}\) was in part written in response to Britain comparing unfavourably to other OECD countries in adult literacy and numeracy.

In 1997, the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) made a standard literacy assessment of 12 countries and Table 2.3 shows how poorly Britain compared with its international competitors.

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The Moser report found that:

"Roughly one in five adults has low literacy skills. However, it is important to emphasise that we are dealing with a spectrum of need ranging from adults who cannot read or write at all to people who may want to brush up rusty skills. It would be naive to suggest that everyone needs or seeks the same kind of help."

Table 2.1: Definition and scale of literacy need

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy skills</th>
<th>National Qualifications Framework Level</th>
<th>% of adult population at this level</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very low</td>
<td>Below entry level</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Entry level (but below level 1, i.e. age 11)</td>
<td>13</td>
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The report held that despite this, many adults who have not reached level 2 (GCSE grades A*–C):

"While they may have literacy problems, they can largely cope with the daily demands of reading and writing. For these adults, attainment of key skills and other qualifications at Level 2 is a more likely and appropriate goal in the context of the National Learning targets announced by the Government in 1998."

Moser found problems with numeracy even more common than with literacy:

"Some researchers suggest that nearly half of all adults in Britain have numeracy skills below the level expected of an 11 year old. A quarter are estimated to have ‘very low’ numeracy skills, which means that they are unlikely to be able to perform even the simplest calculations."

Table 2.4: Definition and scale of numeracy need

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numeracy</th>
<th>National Qualifications Framework Level</th>
<th>% of adult population at this level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very poor</td>
<td>Below Entry Level</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Entry Level</td>
<td>25</td>
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</table>


Mosser set the foundation policy document for the Skills for Life strategy for developing adult literacy and numeracy in England and gave rise to the Skills for Life (2001) strategy,19 which in turn gave rise to the report Success for All (DfES, 2002)20 and to the Embedded Materials Project, CfBT (2003),21 which highlighted a need for a wide range of new materials suited to embedding basic skills for life.

The benefits of improving basic skills are many and extend beyond the individual to families and employers. For an account of studies of the benefits of improving adult literacy and numeracy, see BIS, 2011.

The Leitch review (2006)22 recommended that the UK commit to becoming a world leader in skills by 2020 with a basic skills objective “for 95% of adults to achieve the basic skills of functional literacy and numeracy” by 2020.

**What are functional skills?**

Replacing core skills and then key skills qualifications, functional skills are the latest attempt to address national deficits in English and maths (and ICT as well, although this may be less problematic). They were introduced in autumn 2010, but became mandatory for apprenticeships only in autumn 2012.

The tardiness in replacing key skills with functional skills in apprenticeships was due to the more demanding nature of functional skills and the reluctance of some employers to release apprentices for more time. Key skills had become so watered down to make them easier to deliver that, in the end, they lost credibility.

And one respondent to this report feared that the same may happen to functional skills – rather than rising to their challenge through leadership, staff development and team working, it will be easier to water them down to reduce the challenge – and in doing so make the skills worthless.

Functional skills are assessed at entry level, level 1 and level 2 and are seen as key to the government’s reforms of 14–19 and adult education in England. The skills are intended to ensure that people know how to use English, mathematics and ICT in real-life contexts. They form a core part of each of the four qualification routes for young people but “are not separate curriculum subjects but an important element of the teaching and learning of all subjects”.

Thus they were envisaged to be “embedded” learning, but without clarity about the meaning of the term, or about mechanisms through which embedding would take place. The DfES Embedded Learning Portal (1995–2004), which followed the publication of Success for All, stated that:

> Embedded teaching and learning combines the development of literacy, language and numeracy with vocational and other skills. The skills acquired provide learners with the confidence, competence and motivation necessary for them to progress, gain qualifications and to succeed in life and at work.

A report published by DCSF in October 2008, Delivering 14–19 reform: Next Steps,23 stated that:

> functional skills will be embedded throughout the secondary curriculum and an integral component of all four learning routes.

Neither document, however, made it clear what “embedded” meant.

National guidance on the delivery of functional skills is that this can happen through a range of models, from discrete lessons to fully embedding teaching and learning. However, it is expected that in the long term functional skills will remain the responsibility of subject specialists of English, maths and ICT, but will be reinforced throughout the rest of the curriculum in every lesson. All models of delivery have merit; however, reinforcement across the curriculum is the desired goal, with specialist input where required.

The Functional Skills Support Programme, run by LSIS for post-16 centres, offers a comprehensive, free-of-charge package for CPD at regional and local level to support centres in preparing to teach functional skills. This support, which covers the teaching and learning of functional skills in a variety of contexts, can be accessed through http://excellence.qia.org.uk/functionalskills (Appendix 4 provides additional links). However, at the time of writing this, it is not known whether or in what form this support programme will continue, following the closure of LSIS.

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In 2011, a BIS report, *Review of research and evaluation on improving adult literacy and numeracy skills*, found strong evidence of the following:

- good practice in teaching literacy and numeracy
- the benefits of embedding adult literacy and numeracy in vocational programmes
- the positive impact of working with qualified teachers
- the personal and social impact of adult literacy and numeracy
- the need for multiple ways of engaging in learning – in class, self-study, distance learning, ICT supported learning.

It also found “promising” evidence of:

- blended learning – combining face-to-face and technology-based, formal self-study methods
- the significance of techno-mathematical literacies – a combination of ICT, literacy and numeracy skills
- the time required to make significant learning progress – often in excess of 100 hours.

The report recommended that the sector should continue to work towards achieving a fully qualified workforce, and in particular to increasing the number of qualified numeracy teachers. Research evidence on what works in literacy and numeracy pedagogy should continue to be disseminated throughout the sector, and incorporated into curricula and formative assessment. The report also recommended that:

> Embedding provision should be promoted and treated as a standard option and not as an exception for Level 1 and 2 vocational courses.

However, once again there is no discussion of what “embedding” means. Like previous recommendations and policy documents the evidence for embedding is based on Casey et al (NRDC, 2006). So “embedding” has become a mantra for the best form of delivery of literacy and numeracy, despite a lack of clarity about what it means in practice. It is time, therefore, to actually look at what Casey reported.

> Where a single teacher was asked to take dual responsibility for teaching vocational skills and LLN, the probability of learners succeeding with literacy and numeracy qualifications was lower.

> The research team did not use fixed models of embedding; they judged courses on a range of features of embedding. Four main groups of features emerged:
- Teamwork between language, literacy and numeracy teachers and vocational teachers
- Staff understandings, values and beliefs
- Aspects of teaching and learning that connect language, literacy and numeracy to vocational content
- Policies and organisational features at institutional level

Fully embedded courses all showed features from each of these groups. However, within these broad groups, individual courses achieved the same effects in very different ways. For example, successful collaborative teamwork was achieved through a variety of methods. On some courses, teachers taught alongside one another, on others staff found other ways to link up and create an integrated experience for their shared learners. Importantly, Casey reported that:

> crucial attitudinal features were also present in the embedded courses.

However, this is precisely the form of delivery used by many providers of functional skills, i.e. the delivery model shown by the Casey research to be relatively ineffective.

One of the findings of the Casey research was that structural features alone are unlikely to be sufficient to secure the benefits of embedding.

What is clear, therefore, is that effective **teamwork** is the most essential feature of successful “embedding” but this is not mentioned in national guidance, which is supposedly based on Casey et al. (See Appendix 2 for a list of the features of embedding from Casey et al).

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The term “embedding” used without an emphasis on teamwork can lead to vocational tutors struggling to deliver functional skills alongside their specialism; or to functional skills teachers struggling to “embed” English or maths in vocational contexts they know little or nothing about.

These are practices that led the Wolf review to criticise functional skills on the grounds that some of the best pedagogy may achieve successful embedding but it is too demanding for a mass system. Vocational teachers cannot be expected to successfully embed functional skills; and functional skills specialists cannot be expected to become sufficiently knowledgeable about their learners’ vocational areas.

Furthermore, even if this is accomplished, teachers hit an insoluble problem, namely that having developed functional skills for different contexts, students must then take a central examination, with one set of questions, the same for every candidate. Wolf held that “This is not a circle which can be squared”. (See Appendix 3 for Wolf appendix on functional skills).

AELP, in its response to Wolf, held that good practice entails:

- part embedding, part discrete lessons
- both contextualised and non-contextualised so that learners have transferable skills
- better cross-departmental links within the subject and across college.

Team working is crucial and this has long been recognised. The Bullock report (1975) stated that:

“We cannot emphasise too strongly the need for strong specialist representation where English is part of an integrated programme.

In case studies of the implementation of core skills (Oates and Harkin, 1995), a lone example of maths specialists working within a vocational team was found to be clearly ahead of other programme strategies.

Colleges are often complex environments with competing departmental structures and attitudes to functional skills. Ensuring effective teamwork across a whole college is difficult in practice. Yet, without this, Wolf is right – vocational tutors cannot make up for the failures of many years of schooling; and functional skills specialists cannot hope to contextualise without the inputs of vocational tutors.

The practical difficulties of embedding were acknowledged in National Foundation for Educational Research (2003), Basic Skills and Key Skills: A Review of International Literature Final Report, which found that, although embedding of basic skills appeals more to vocational learners, following Unwin and Wellington (2001),

“embedding key skills in other learning activities has proved difficult in practice.

More recently, CUREE evidence to CAVTL (2012) further supports the view that in practice “embedding” is difficult to achieve, unless there is a strong emphasis on teamwork:

“Our analysis of the research on literacy and numeracy shows a widespread consensus in the literature of the benefits of embedding English and Maths in vocational studies but also the difficulty of achieving this.

The key message from the evidence about literacy and numeracy within vocational education is that it is crucial to embed LLN in vocational contexts and to support such embedding through partnerships between literacy and numeracy specialists and the relevant vocational domain.

So embedding of functional skills remains the mantra, despite the practical difficulties. Furthermore, while embedding may work in skills for life, where skills levels are quite low, at higher levels embedding may rarely have the potential to raise standards of English or maths, especially when delivered by vocational teachers whose own skills may be little beyond those of the learners. Some discrete provision of specialist input is usually necessary, as well as embedding by vocational tutors who have been trained to a sufficiently high standard to do this effectively.

Where are we now?

More than 20 years after the Moser report (1991), there are still problems with levels of English and maths. For example, Ofsted’s annual report for 2011/12 held that:

“the system needs to do more to ensure that young people secure English and mathematics skills by age 19.

28 CUREE, 2012. Submission to the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning.
The report emphasised that effective leadership is needed to bring this about. This chimes with the need for teamwork, and for attitudinal change that is necessary for embedding of functional skills, as reported by Casey et al.

The Lingfield review (2012) recognised and recommended that teachers of functional skills English and maths need appropriate specialist qualifications (see Appendix 1):

> Whatever might be their earlier qualifications, it is necessary to learn how to teach literacy as a specialised activity. For lecturers in these (English and maths) disciplines the Review panel recommends that the required qualification should be our proposed new Level 5 Certificate in Further Education, with special emphasis on foundation skills.

As a result of the Lingfield review, which recommended that a level 5 specialist qualification for tutors of functional skills English and maths, LSIS has conducted a review of the qualifications during 2012–13.

Despite the Wolf review’s criticisms of functional skills, respondents to this research believed very strongly that learners repeating GCSE failures is not the way forward; that the motivating power of vocational context to learn English and maths is very powerful and should not be lost.

The Lingfield review acknowledged that although FE should not be expected to remedy the deficiencies of schooling, for the foreseeable future it has a vital and necessary role to help learners overcome poor functional skills in English and maths.

> Clearly, while the government’s new school reforms take effect, the remedial work in FE will have to be sustained. There is excellent work going on in the foundation studies and there may always have to be some provision for remedial literacy and numeracy in FE. Indeed, in the short term, the Wolf proposals may increase the amount.

Ofsted recognises that only when those charged with the leadership of education provision take the delivery of functional skills seriously enough to ensure effective teamwork in their delivery is it likely that a national deficit in the development of English and maths will be overcome.

> Leaders are the key people in changing and improving the culture and performance of the organisation. Leaders provide the role models for the rest of the institution.

Learning and skills provision is seen as “of crucial importance to youth employment, adult skills, economic recovery and, indeed, social cohesion” but the report suggests that the sector “needs reorientating towards a moral determination to provide high quality and relevant provision”.

A reorientation of provision can be achieved only through strong leadership and senior management support. Oates and Harkin (1995), who led developments in core skills, were clear that:

> Teachers need the active support of their senior managers if they are to implement core skills effectively. If teams are to meet regularly enough to audit and plan learning programmes; if learners are to be provided with adequate induction programmes; if teachers are to be given appropriate staff development, then the most senior staff need to create a suitable climate and provide the resources for this to happen.

Unfortunately, and for a whole range of cultural and operational reasons, this has not happened in many providers. In recognition of what still needs to be done, Matthew Hancock, parliamentary undersecretary of state for skills at BIS, announced at the AoC conference in 2012 a doubling of the amount of funding for adult English and maths functional skills, and for English and maths within an apprenticeship.

Money, however, although necessary is not sufficient to improve present practice. For this to happen, as Casey et al (2006) maintained, “crucial attitudinal features” must also be present in the embedded courses. It is the job of college leaders to shape the attitudes of staff and a culture in which the development of functional skills is taken seriously.

**What is it that leaders need to do?**

Leaders need to ensure that the development of English and maths for all learners is adequate for their needs for learning and for adult life in general by:

- insisting that managers in all departments take the development of functional skills seriously
- establishing an efficient system of delivery that makes use of specialist expertise and also of the motivational power of learner interests by embedding the skills, whenever possible, in all subjects of study
- enabling genuine team working, which is crucial for functional skills specialists to be able to work with and support learners and their vocational tutors.
Part 2: Case studies of functional skills practice

Learning providers have been left to find their own models of delivering functional skills. As has been described above, although “embedding” has been the national mantra for delivery, there has been little clarity about what this means. Providers have been free to interpret this as they wish; or to ignore any attempt at embedding. What follows are several case studies of current practice, exemplifying different approaches. In the light of the discussion in part 1 of this study, the case studies will help to point the way forward to better practice across the learning and skills sector in the development of functional skills.

Case study 1

A college that is committed to training all staff who teach functional skills to level 5

The college has a mixed delivery model to deliver functional skills. For the first six weeks of their courses, learners are given initial assessments before being allocated to appropriate levels of functional skills development. A certain amount of embedding takes place within vocational programmes in which tutors are expected to bring out naturally occurring opportunities to practise English and maths and, in addition, functional skills specialist staff deliver the skills in 1.5 hours a week.

Apprentice-based functional skills presents additional challenges, as some employers may be reluctant to release apprentices for additional time required for functional skills, as compared with key skills. Finding ways to deliver functional skills cost-effectively to sometimes very small groups of apprentices is also difficult at times.

The best case scenario is that teamwork between functional skills specialists and vocational staff will meet the needs of learners. It is also the case that some vocational staff have insufficiently high levels of functional skills to deliver both discrete and embedded parts of delivery. The practice varies across departments, with some being more receptive and efficient in the delivery of functional skills than others. The LSIS support programme has been used to help raise the awareness of functional skills among all staff so that they can plan to use naturally occurring parts of training to bring out and practise the skills.

The key to development is seen to be effective communication and team working. Senior staff are behind endeavours to improve functional skills, not least because the college is in a socially and economically deprived area and the college has a strong mission for staff see the value of improving standards of functional skills and the positive effect this has on learners’ life chances. Even when some vocational teachers are also able to deliver functional skills English, some discrete provision is believed to be useful in order to cover the necessary skills.

The way in which the Wolf report viewed functional skills has been misconstrued. Vocational staff cannot, through embedding, make up for the deficiencies of schooling, especially if they themselves have low levels of English and maths; and English and maths specialists cannot be expected to be able to contextualise in areas about which they know little or nothing. Wolf held that GCSE should be the standard for all learners.

However, college respondents believed that contextualising functional skills is very important, as many students resist doing GCSE again. And even when they have GCSE C+, some learners still have development needs in functional skills, so all learners should be given the opportunity to progress. The background educational experience of some students is that they cannot do maths – however, once they recognise the role of maths and its importance in context, their aversion to maths is reduced. Students can learn that there are maths skills that they know and can use. Context makes learning so much easier.

In response to the underlying issues raised by Wolf, the college is striving to raise the functional skills levels of all staff engaged in their delivery. It is committed to ensuring that functional skills staff are qualified to level 5 (in some cases using level 3 as a stepping stone) so that they are able, through team working with vocational colleagues, to deliver the skills effectively.

The college policy is that functional skills staff must be qualified as teachers to level 5, and that other staff who wish to do so may take level 5 functional skills qualifications without charge. In some cases, staff are taking the course even though this year they do not have functional skills on their timetable. When they are not English specialists, the course may open teachers’ eyes to the scope and importance of the subject. Senior staff are supportive of the endeavour, so training is available in the evenings, over several terms, and without fee, for any member of staff who wishes to undertake it. Even with this amount of training for staff, it was thought that the guided learning hours to deliver functional skills (30) may be insufficient to raise the skills of some learners, even with more highly qualified staff. As discrete provision is very limited, there is a role for vocational teachers to support learners by using opportunities to embed and reinforce the skills in vocational contexts.
Some departments of the college are keener on particular skills than others; and the degree to which vocational teachers support their learners to develop functional skills varies too. So, although the college is doing much, more may need to be done so that all vocational staff help their students see the relevance and usefulness of functional skills.

**Positives**

- Senior staff recognise the social and economic importance of raising levels of functional skills.
- Senior staff are committed to raising staff expertise in delivering functional skills.
- Practical means of developing staff have been put in place, including qualifying to teach at level 5.

**Challenges**

- Some college departments are still not fully committed to functional skills development.
- Lack of sufficient guided learning hours to successfully develop functional skills (30 guided learning hours cf. the time required to make significant learning progress – often in excess of 100 hours, as found by BIS, 2011.)
- Belief that GCSEs should not replace functional skills – the motivating power of vocational context should not be lost and even when learners have GCSE C+, they may still have a need to develop functional skills.

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**Case study 2**

**A college that is committed to a team-based approach to delivering functional skills**

One department is responsible for delivering functional skills in English and maths across the college. The college’s functional skills provision is mainly to 16 to 18-year-olds, but also covers apprenticeships. The employer coordinator views functional skills as fundamental to business development for any commercial organisation – it offers a good return on investment, improves the retention of staff, and aids career progression.

GCSE grade C+ is not considered adequate to meet the needs of learners, so all learners are required to take functional skills. On induction to the college it is made clear that English and maths are an important part of the curriculum for all learners.

Functional skills tutors link with vocational tutors across the college to ensure that discrete provision (30 guided learning hours a year) is supplemented by vocational tutors recognising functional skills in schemes of work, and using opportunities within the vocational context to develop learners’ English and maths, and for them to practise and reinforce their functional skills.

In apprenticeship training, 10 weeks of discrete provision (30 guided learning hours) are given to learners who do not already have GCSE C+.

Discrete provision is thought necessary so that important, generic aspects of the skills are brought out, without the risk that they become embedded out of sight; as was sometimes the case with key skills.

Some vocational tutors are sensitive to their own weaknesses in functional skills – they have got by on less than level 2 functional skills, so why shouldn’t their students? However, as a learning organisation, the college is committed to develop their skills – bringing out what they know and what more they need to know. To help vocational staff feel more confident in their ability to help learners with functional skills, level 2 functional skills training is available and last year more than 60 members of staff undertook this.
Thus there is a team approach to delivering functional skills – with both functional skills specialists and vocational tutors being involved. Senior management support for this whole endeavour is present. The manager responsible for college-wide delivery of English and maths has many years of experience, in different colleges, and has seen many different methods of delivery. In her professional judgement, the approach at the college – discrete provision by English and maths specialists, supplemented by vocational tutors who have themselves at least level 2 in functional skills, works best.

The proposal, post-Wolf, that functional skills be replaced by a pre-GCSE qualification was viewed with uncertainty – although it is necessary to wait to see what the qualification; and any redesigned GCSEs, will look like – there is concern to recognise the important role of functional skills development within vocational contexts – functional skills is motivating for learners, many of whom have not succeeded in GCSE. It was thought that any changes to functional skills should be made only after proper consultation with teachers, trainers and education providers.

It was felt strongly that the expectation that in 30 guided learning hours a year, colleges should be expected to compensate for 11 years of schooling that failed to prepare learners adequately in English and maths is simply unrealistic. Whatever qualifications are used to assess learners’ ability in these subjects, more time should be allocated to the task to help young people develop these fundamental functional skills.

Positives

- Senior management support to develop functional skills provision.
- Discrete delivery of some functional skills so that learners make progress and overcome weaknesses.
- Functional skills staff work with vocational tutors to help them embed functional skills.

Challenges

- 30 guided learning hours is considered insufficient to develop functional skills
- Post-Wolf, it is thought important to retain functional skills and the motivating power of vocational context.

Case study 3

A college that faces a number of challenges in developing functional skills

The college has three teams of functional skills specialists, who work together to some extent; and a fourth team will be integrated:

- Foundation learning
- Level 2 and above
- Apprenticeships
- Plus skills for life 19+.

The college is seeking a systematic approach to the development of functional skills, which currently works well only at foundation level, where functional skills specialists work with vocational teaching staff to embed functional skills. In other areas, embedding is patchier and depends on the degree of support from faculty directors, for example; and the area of study. For example, there is generally less support in areas such as construction and engineering than in health and social care, although this is not uniform – with more support to embed maths in the former; and more to embed English in the latter.

Some barriers to more cross-college embedded provision are lack of support from the senior management team – decisions are left to faculty heads with variable results; lack of adequate initial teacher training (ITT) and other training of teachers, so that even if they have level 2 maths and English, they do not feel competent to deliver functional skills; a focus in funding streams and inspections on the outcomes of specific vocational skills but less on functional skills; a feeling among staff that innovations come and go – why put effort into embedding functional skills if policy may change in a year or so? All in all, the development of functional skills is not a priority for teachers beyond foundation learning.

Even at that level, the expectation that learners will progress from entry level 3 to level 1 in one year with only 1.5 hours a week support is unrealistic. Given the barrier to education progression of low levels of functional skills, perhaps more attention should be paid to their development.

Typically, functional skills specialists deliver discrete functional skills in 1.5 hours sessions, and do not normally go into vocational areas to see how they may be developed in context. In a normal week, a functional skills tutor may teach up to 250 students and there is little time to liaise with vocational tutors, other than occasionally and informally. Learning support assistants have an open-door policy to help learners on demand. At present, there are no examples of effective team working between functional skills and vocational tutors.
Vocational tutors are more supportive of functional skills development in some areas than others. In general, for example, business and travel and tourism are more supportive than hairdressing or construction. The initial assessment of learners’ functional skills is made by vocational tutors and this is sometimes done inaccurately so that students are assigned to the wrong course and have a mountain to climb in functional skills. Some heads of faculty are more supportive than others, and there is a sense of some frustration among functional skills staff that they are powerless to effect change. Effective systems to deliver functional skills as part of the wider curriculum are a work in progress.

“Learning walks” – in which senior staff visit classrooms unannounced, talk to students, and observe staff – may help to identify areas that the college needs to address.

In order to deliver functional skills in context, vocational staff would need a higher level of functional skills than the mandatory course level – some tutors do not have this, so any attempt to develop a more embedded approach to functional skills delivery would need quite a lot of CPD. However, most CPD currently focuses on vocational skills rather than functional skills, and it was thought that even with increased CPD some vocational staff would not feel confident to develop functional skills.

It was thought that it is unrealistic to expect FE in around 1.5 hours a week to remedy the maths and English failures of 11 years of schooling. Nevertheless, functional skills was thought to be a useful qualification that motivates learners more than GCSE. However, to be effective functional skills would need to form a more carefully planned part of the curriculum, and possibly employers could be involved to show staff and students how important functional skills are to employment. At a time of resource constraints, the time needed may be very hard to find.

Learning technology may help students monitor progress and access resources; however, it is recognised that this requires just as high levels of staff time and expertise. It harnesses IT to aid learning but is not a cheaper option – it simply uses the available resource in different ways. To make a change to more IT-rich teaching, teachers would need “thinking time” to reflect on adaptations, develop and utilise IT-based resources, etc.

### Positives
- A recognition by some staff that the college needs to do more to develop functional skills.

### Challenges
- Lack of senior management support for the development of functional skills.
- Patchy faculty-level support for the development of functional skills.
- Lack of time for the delivery of functional skills.
- Lack of professional development for staff to be able to embed functional skills.
- Concern post-Wolf that functional skills may be undermined – thus losing their motivational power for learners, and a scepticism that policies come and go and functional skills may disappear, so why invest effort in developing strategies for functional skills.
Case study 4

A college that now recognises the importance of functional skills in meeting the needs of employers

The college admits to not having a fantastic track record with functional skills, having seen it as “bolt-on” provision, but now recognises how important they are in the skills set of learners; and how important in preparing learners for employability. As the college moves towards more project-based curricula, it is clear that functional skills will play an important role.

The college used to take an undifferentiated approach to functional skills delivery – all learners on a course would take one level, however, it is now realised that learners’ needs differ. Therefore, individual learners are placed on functional skills levels appropriate for them.

The delivery model for functional skills is that the college brings in specialist staff from skills for life to deliver discrete functional skills sessions to develop functional skills and prepare learners for assessment; and that within vocational assignments staff embed functional skills. This is a journey that the college has embarked upon but there is still some way to go.

Some departments find it easier than others to develop functional skills – in construction, for example, there are some difficulties with English, in part because of staff weaknesses in this area, whereas some other areas find embedding easier because the staff have higher levels of functional skills.

Reflecting on the Wolf report view that functional skills may not be fit for purpose – vocational staff do not have sufficiently high levels of functional skills, and functional skills specialists too little vocational knowledge to contextualise – it was thought that the motivating power of vocational context is so vital that it is important not to lose this. Furthermore, many learners are not capable of gaining GCSE C+ and need stepping stones to improve their level of knowledge of the skills is secure. Liaison is necessary between functional skills and vocational tutors to ensure that before learners try to implement functional skills tutors nurture vocational tutors in vocational contexts with vocational tutors, who often has some knowledge of the vocational specialism; and the vocational tutors who can embed aspects of functional skills. Thus the endeavour is to have a real team-based approach. This is helped by the fact that most centres are quite small, so that staff know one another well. Part of the endeavour is to recognise who in the team is best placed to do what. Vocational tutors are best placed to show the functionality of skills, by designing appropriate problem-solving scenarios in their subjects that make use of the learners’ maths, English and ICT.

Functional skills tutors focus on discrete delivery of the skills, to ensure that before learners try to implement them in vocational contexts with vocational tutors, their level of knowledge of the skills is secure. Liaison is necessary between functional skills and vocational tutors to ensure that this happens; and to an extent functional skills tutors nurture vocational tutors in functional skills.

The experience of the training provider is that it is very important to prepare a solid foundation of skills upon which to build. Once the foundations have been laid, it is important that learners can then progress as quickly as possible. Beyond foundation level, the delivery of functional skills becomes more about using problem-solving scenarios for learners to use the skills. At level 2, the functional skills are quite challenging and sometimes require learners to use a skill in several different settings or ways. It is considered important that learners should be able to access learning in higher levels of basic skills as they need, so that if, for example, higher level maths skills are required to progress in their career later, they can access learning to obtain them.

Positives

- Senior managers now recognise that functional skills are important in changing patterns of delivery and meeting the needs of employers.

Challenges

- Some departments are reluctant to take a rigorous approach to developing functional skills provision.
- Need to develop better systems of professional development of staff to deliver functional skills.
- Concern that post-Wolf the motivating power of vocational context should not be lost.

Case study 5

A training provider that is building a genuinely team-based approach to developing functional skills

The training provider delivers foundation learning and apprenticeships for between 500 and 600 learners, plus several hundred more taught by subcontractors. A variety of vocational areas are covered, including engineering, catering and business administration. The provider is linked to adult education, which is able to offer specialist support.

The model used to implement functional skills is that diagnostic tests are administered with care to ensure an accurate picture of a learner’s prior achievement and needs. It is important not to place learners on too high a course that may undermine their confidence.

Delivery of functional skills is divided between three people – an functional skills specialist, based in adult learning, who may be called on to meet additional learning needs (ALN) and offer specialist support; a functional skills tutor embedded in the centre, who often has some knowledge of the vocational specialism; and the vocational tutors who can embed aspects of functional skills. Thus the endeavour is to have a real team-based approach. This is helped by the fact that most centres are quite small, so that staff know one another well. Part of the endeavour is to recognise who in the team is best placed to do what. Vocational tutors are best placed to show the functionality of skills, by designing appropriate problem-solving scenarios in their subjects that make use of the learners’ maths, English and ICT.

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A particularly challenging area in the training provider’s experience is developing learners’ writing skills – to do this they must be given good-quality feedback by tutors about their writing. Some vocational tutors may find this difficult. Similarly, maths at level 2 and beyond presents challenges to learners and to tutors. The organisation is “working towards” improving this. CPD for tutors tried to ensure that all are competent and confident to level 2 (which is a requirement for QTLS status, conferred by IfL). LSIS has supported the provider to do this; and has also given support for subject specialist training to level 5 for functional skills teachers. Adult education is also able to offer support to vocational tutors who need to develop their own functional skills. It is considered desirable to make level 3 English and maths mandatory for all vocational tutors so that they can support learners.

It is thought that not all functional skills are appropriate for all learners and that it is futile to try to develop skills that learners do not need. In some cases, the standards are inappropriate and there are conflicting standards within the same framework – so that to achieve in the vocational subject you may need a different level from functional skills or vice versa.

It is also considered important that learners understand the standards so that they share responsibility for the development of their skills. Unfortunately, the functional skills standards are written in a way that is not easy for learners to share or understand. Just as LSIS produced materials to help learners understand key skills, so too there is a need for something similar to help learners to take ownership of functional skills.

The training provider welcomed functional skills and thinks they are more fit for purpose than key skills, and that it is right to allow realistic of readily available tools, such as internet searches and calculators. However, it is feared that, just as key skills were watered down because they were found difficult at first, the same may happen with functional skills. Pedagogically, functional skills are more challenging than key skills: they require vocational tutors to design realistic problem-solving scenarios that make use of the skills. Any new initiative, especially one that involves teams of teachers working together to meet the needs of learners, is bound to be challenging. Any dumbing down to make them easier to implement will defeat the whole purpose – to raise learners’ functional skills.

Employers need to become more aware of the benefits of functional skills so that they too support the endeavour.

The provider disagreed with Wolf’s view that functional skills may not be fit for purpose: indeed, GCSE may not enable learners to apply their knowledge of maths, English or ICT to a high enough level in their vocational area. Certain aspects of GCSE – for example, the ability to use trigonometry or algebra, may be useful in certain contexts but not in others; they may also badge learners who can use them as “clever”, however, if learners do not need these skills, then wrestling with attaining GCSE may hamper their progression in vocational areas.

**Positives**

- Strong senior management support for the delivery of functional skills.
- Recognition that a team-based approach is necessary for successful embedding of functional skills.

**Challenges**

- Concern that post-Wolf the motivating power of functional skills should not be undervalued, coupled with a belief that GCSEs are not necessarily suited to vocational learning.
- Concern that, following the experience of implementing key skills, functional skills may be “dumbed down” to make them easier to deliver, rather than rising to the challenges this presents.
- Concern that aspirations for all vocational tutors to have at least level 2 in English and maths do not go far enough, and that to embed functional skills effectively, tutors should be trained to level 3.
Conclusions

As a country, we have struggled to provide all citizens with an adequate foundation of basic skills for personal, social and professional purposes. Functional skills represent the latest attempt to achieve this.

As the evidence for this paper shows, their successful implementation requires several things:

- Committed leadership by senior managers and employers to take the skills seriously enough to create a culture and operational systems that make successful implementation possible.

- Genuine teamwork between functional skills specialists and vocational tutors to share an element of discrete provision and vocational embedding.

- Adequate initial training and in-service professional development of staff who deliver functional skills to gain qualifications to at least level 2 in English and maths.

- Enough tutor time for learners to make significant progress – often in excess of 100 hours, compared to the current 30 or so hours (BIS, 2011).

These recommendations should be given careful consideration, in the interests of ensuring that sufficient numbers of learners can progress to level 3 and beyond in vocational learning, to meet the economic needs of the country.

Effective practice in partnerships between employers and vocational learning providers: phase 1 summary

Summary of the key points made in the IfL preliminary report (June 201 2)

- There is still a long way to go to achieve satisfactory levels of employer engagement in vocational learning.

- Large employers are in a position to negotiate bespoke training, but most firms are SMEs with weaker links to providers.

- Some education providers have good systems to reach out to SMEs, but vocational tutors report lack of time as a limiting factor in forming closer links.

Issues that the national Commission on Adult Vocational Learning may wish to consider further

There is some good practice in developing links between vocational learning providers and employers, to the benefit of both, as well as to the economy.

- Is it possible to find examples of good practice, to determine what factors brought it about; may sustain it; and how it may be disseminated to vocational education providers and employers alike?

- What may be done to help more hands-on employer involvement in providing suitable work placements – particularly at level 3 and above?

- Just as parents and communities are being encouraged to take a more active part in schooling, should employers take a more active role in vocational education and training, including curriculum design, delivery and assessment?

- Is it possible to develop the concept of ‘employer involvement’, so that the mutual benefits of employer input to curriculum planning and delivery; and of assessment for learning are more widely known and appreciated?

- Is it possible to identify some examples of effective practice in forging such links and show how the time and other resources were found to establish and sustain links?

- Is it possible for colleges and providers to identify and protect time for vocational teachers to work in partnership with employers?
Phase 2: Employer engagement with vocational education

Introduction

For the purposes of this report, the views of a range of employers of all sizes have been sought. The employer base used is predominantly from the engineering and business sectors. The views of major employers and those of SMEs are reported separately to reflect the differentiation that is required from providers when effectively engaging employers with varying expectations of vocational training. While, for clarity, the views are reported separately it has been possible to identify some themes that are common across vocational training when seeking effective employer engagement.

This report also considers how employers can support vocational training with up to date resources and the opportunities for vocational teachers to engage with current technologies and practices.

IfL hosted a seminar for CAVTL in Cambridge on 17 January 2013 to debate a range of issues emerging from the research.

The whole area of employer engagement with vocational education and training is difficult to summarise, because what has become clearly apparent is that the only consistency to emerge is the inconsistency of approaches used by colleges and training providers. Examples range from employer-led engagement, to college-created policy and departments specifically for employer engagement, to individual tutors using their own vocational expertise to forge links with local business.

In addition, there is a large gulf between major employers’ and SMEs’ respective views and expectations of what employer engagement actually means. Major employers see it as part of their role to engage fully with vocational education; dictate the training they require; and input at every opportunity to local and national policy. In contrast, SMEs are highly dependent on their local provision and expect to be guided through the vocational training labyrinth by experienced educators.

From the perspective of some providers, there was disquiet about the nature of some apprenticeships – with the view that some employers abuse the system for cheap labour; or train only for their own needs, and do not really provide a nationally valid and transportable set of skills.

Conversely, it was thought that some providers view employer engagement as a financial issue not an educational one, and that boosting learner numbers to access funding is the priority in the present competitive climate.

Major employers

Major employers demand full engagement with educational systems and training providers. They have the human resources to plan for long-term skills requirements and to engage with local and national policymaking and decision-making. These employers are not afraid to use their economic position to influence the required outcomes from training. While very high levels of employer engagement can easily be recognised at all points of vocational training, from engagement at government level to representing their industries on sector skills councils, to working with local training providers and following individual progress, there is some evidence that the vocational education sector does not respond well to their demands.

One major employer recruits approximately 300 apprentices each year. Each apprentice is required to spend the first 12 months of training within the company’s own training centre. This, according to the employer, is because it does not feel able to trust the vocational education system to instil the necessary work ethic and commitment it expects in young employees and prefers to take responsibility for these itself before engaging the services of local providers.

Another major employer recruits on a similar scale, but with the addition that it offers training to apprentices who are employed by businesses that are part of their supply chain. The company has not always experienced the easiest of relationships with its local college provision. At present the local provider is used to deliver qualifications only up to level 3, with any higher provision placed in the hands of four universities that work closely with the company. In addition, tutors from the local college are required to deliver their programmes at the company’s own training centre, where standards can be continuously monitored.

The company states that it experienced considerable resistance to its stance when it was first put into place but over time this has decreased as the tutors and the college have experienced the benefits of working closely with the employer and having direct access to the most up to date resources and manufacturing techniques available.

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29 Those interviewed included four major employers (three engineering, one business sector); eight SMEs (four engineering, four business sector); two providers directly and a further 10 providers who gave their input at a seminar. In addition, 17 submissions of evidence that were presented to CAVTL were taken into account.
Some areas of the public services use apprenticeship programmes for all non-medical or specialist training and nationwide employ many thousands of apprentices at any one time. For example, one medium-size hospital in the east of England, serving a local population of approximately 100,000 people, currently has 182 people on intermediate or advanced apprenticeship programmes across a wide range of subject specialisms. With such a huge deployment of staff across the UK, it is not possible to report on the level, and type, of employer engagement that takes place except to state that locally there are very strong links with the provider. The public services representative raised concerns about the ability of even major employers to influence government policymaking for vocational education. Representatives from the public services were closely involved in the consultation processes for the implementation of functional skills in apprenticeship programmes.

From the start of the process, they raised concerns about the qualification content and the additional college attendance required. The interviewee was clearly of the opinion that they were requested to take part in the consultation so it could be shown that a major employer was involved. None of the concerns raised were taken into account when the qualifications were drafted. The organisation now finds itself in the position of struggling to manage a rota of college attendance for thousands of employees. In addition, it has to purchase information technology systems purely to satisfy the qualification systems that apparently have not been used by business since 2004.

All major employers have a solid understanding of the necessity for vocational tutors to have the opportunity to update their own skills to keep abreast of industry requirements, indeed they may insist on it. While all have no issues with providing the necessary resources for this to take place, they are clear that it is not their place to facilitate it. **It is the provider’s responsibility to support tutors’ CPD and ensure the quality of their provision.**

When it comes to the provision of physical resources for training the interviews seemed to show little or no evidence of an altruistic approach from major employers. The basis of employers becoming engaged in vocational education was seen to be rational self-interest – they must see some tangible benefit for their investment of time or other resource. There is a willingness to provide equipment and resources for training provided that there is a direct benefit for the company involved.

For example, the motor vehicle department at a college in the south-west has a close working relationship with a major motor manufacturer and provides apprentice training on its behalf. The department is fully equipped with up to date motor vehicles and equipment, all provided by the manufacturer for the apprentice training. In contrast, it is easy to identify tutors in motor vehicle departments, delivering the same qualification, buying vehicles from a local scrapyard for apprentice training. There are no motor vehicle manufacturers near them that need to engage their services and repeated requests for up to date equipment fall on deaf ears, as there is no direct benefit to the motor manufacturers. **From the evidence gathered, it seems that the current government’s belief that businesses will gladly provide training providers with state of the art resources purely for educational purposes is unfounded.**

**Small and medium-sized enterprises**

In general, SMEs’ opinion of employer engagement is the complete opposite of that put forward by large businesses. Rather than being able to dictate the course and purpose of training, they are highly dependent on the educational expertise of their local providers.

Few small and medium employers could demonstrate any knowledge of sector skills councils, qualification frameworks or funding mechanisms. They struggle to understand the complexities of the qualification system as a whole and generally do not participate in consultations and the like, as they feel their voice will not be heard. However, it is rare to hear any criticism about vocational education itself; on the contrary, there is much praise for the support they receive.

SMEs are in a very different place from that of major industries. Where the latter often plan for the future one or two decades in advance, using the resources at their disposal, SMEs are very often more concerned with immediate business demands. There is often great appreciation when the employer engagement by providers gives good initial information, advice and guidance, followed by ongoing support. It is one less thing that SMEs have to worry about.

There appears to be incredulity at the continuous shift in qualification requirements and a sense that those responsible are not connected to the ‘real world’ with many of the changes not suiting the requirements of SMEs. There are representative bodies for most sectors of industry, but these rarely have the active support of the majority of SMEs.

When the currency of vocational tutors’ knowledge is considered, again there is a marked difference between SMEs’ opinions and those of large industries. If an SME has to adopt a new process, or there are new developments in their particular sector, they are likely to seek the expertise of their local provider to update and upgrade their skills base.
SMEs are inclined to view their local provider as the ‘font of all knowledge’ with a key role in supporting business progression. Good links are, therefore, important.

With the exception of physical resources being provided for a specific training purpose, no evidence was found of SMEs being in a position to supply training providers with equipment. The current economic climate means that this situation is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future.

Regarding the updating of tutor knowledge, many SMEs stated their willingness to participate in such schemes, but the nature of short-term planning for businesses of this type makes it difficult. By necessity, a training provider that wishes to engage in this practice needs to plan well in advance for cover and often SMEs are not able to give firm commitments for the future.

It is worth noting that, according to the Skills Funding Agency, “new research collated by the FE sector found that small to medium-sized businesses are increasingly valuing recruits who have been to college and are taking on apprentices and providing vocational training for their employees”.

**Updating of teaching staff**

From interviews, it seems that the vocational currency of staff is most difficult in school-based vocational provision and least problematic in the military, where the processes of keeping up to date have, up to now, been excellent, as tutors nearly always have recent experience of using the skills. In FE colleges, currency is patchier. One person suggested that work experience ought to be focused not on learners but on staff.

At one time, the term ‘Pride in Craft’ was commonly used and applied in vocational education. It is due to this ethos that the post-compulsory sector has been ‘lucky’ when it comes to the continued professionalism of vocational teachers. It often appears to be forgotten that before entering teaching, many from vocational backgrounds have spent years developing their knowledge and skills.

There is immense personal pride in the attainment and maintenance of a high level of vocational skill, which many are not willing to relinquish. To this end, many vocational teachers maintain their own skill level as a matter of course, in a variety of ways and very often in their own time. This is more than adequately outlined in a report by Janet Hamilton Broad at the Institute of Education.

The evidence uncovered for this report supports many of her findings. It was also confirmed in IfL’s evidence for the Skills Commission on specialisation.

A range of views has been received from a number of providers who are at pains to demonstrate their commitment to vocational tutors’ CPD. Such submissions include statements such as “It is a mandatory requirement that all teachers undertake seven days professional development each year” and “As an organisation we are committed to having a highly professional workforce.”

However, it is far more difficult to establish whether mandatory requirements are real and actually met, and if they are, how much of the professional development has a vocational focus, as distinct from organisational requirements.

It is difficult to suggest that there is any form of coherent approach to vocational updating in any area of the sector, the only exception being military training where many teachers are seconded for a limited time, and therefore bring a constant turnover of current practice to training. No evidence has been found of a provider that routinely sends vocational tutors into industry for updating and it appears that the sector has become highly and overly dependent on individual professionalism.

It is fair to suggest that the post-compulsory system has taken full advantage of this deeply ingrained professionalism by vocational tutors, to make updating a personal requirement rather than an organisational one. It is difficult to suggest how this issue can be addressed without a change to national policy – for it to be a contractual requirement for vocational teachers to receive updating placements.

IfL’s extensive evidence from four years of monitoring and analysing FE teachers’ CPD shows that there is a broadly even split between the time spent by teachers on subject and vocational updating, and on updating teaching methods. This pattern has been consistent over the four years and so too are the figures showing that teachers broadly carry out double the number of hours required by the regulations in place from 2007 to 2012: 30 hours a year for full-time teachers and trainers, pro-rated for part-time teachers. The different pattern emerging from more in-depth research by IfL is that teachers spend their own time on subject or vocational updating, despite their college or provider’s lack of support, rather than because of its support. This is a risky basis for nationally excellent vocational education.

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32 IfL, 2012. *Is specialist professional development vital for teachers and trainers, and for the strength of the further education and skills sector?* London: IfL.
Common themes for effective employer engagement

Two key themes emerge from colleges and training providers that engage in effective employer engagement regardless of the type of size of the industry concerned:

- A clear recognition that vocational teaching and learning cannot be packaged under a single banner. Each profession, even each company, has developed its own culture, language and history. Effective engagement happens when organisations use this knowledge from within to open good lines of communication and engagement and specialist vocational updating for teachers and trainers.

- A whole-organisation approach is adopted to ensure accurate communication to all levels of business as suggested in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who may impact on employer engagement</th>
<th>Strengths they can bring to employer engagement</th>
<th>Combined strengths of a whole-organisation approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal or chief executive</td>
<td>National and local business connections</td>
<td>Leadership, decision making, finance and policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior management</td>
<td>Implementation of policy</td>
<td>Conduit between operational capability and decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heads of department</td>
<td>Operational capability</td>
<td>Practical implementation of policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knowledge of teaching staff skills base</td>
<td>Professional development of teaching staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced teachers</td>
<td>Subject knowledge</td>
<td>Understanding of industry culture and language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Curriculum design and delivery</td>
<td>Understanding of own CPD requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New teachers</td>
<td>Fresh knowledge of industry and business practice</td>
<td>Contribute currency to curriculum design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field services and workplace assessors</td>
<td>Current “on the ground” knowledge and information of local business and industry</td>
<td>Daily face-to-face contact with employers– and employees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The evidence from two specialist seminars that IfL held in partnership with the 157 Group and the Institute of Education confirmed the importance of partnerships at different levels in the organisation, and especially emphasised the importance of vocational teachers being actively engaged with employers for CPD and for specialist curriculum innovation.  

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33 Excellence in vocational education – Leading partnerships and vocational learning, held on 6 November 2012; and Collaborative professionalism – working beyond the institution, held on 31 January 2013.
Conclusions

From the feedback received, colleges and training providers need to ask themselves some key questions if they are to effectively engage with employers:

- Does the provider make full use of all the human resources available to create sustainable effective employer engagement?
- Are the best human resources applied to the level at which the engagement is required and, especially, are vocational teachers actively involved?
- Are there sufficient opportunities for teachers’ CPD to ensure that employers can have confidence in the standards of delivery?
- Employers take risks to drive their business forward. Are providers willing to share this risk in the interest of local economic development?
- Are providers ready to rise to the challenges that will be presented to the sector by industry in the future?

Where providers have taken a positive approach to such questions, it is normal to observe a solid and close working relationship. Local connections through staff and chambers of commerce, for example, are seen as absolutely necessary to engage with SMEs. Providers have become better at engaging employers and many have set up studio schools and other more employment-focused forms of provision. So there is good practice out there, particularly in apprenticeship delivery.

The most effective employer engagement is found where providers have a whole-organisation approach, applying the strengths of individuals in different roles to employer engagement where they can have the most impact. When engaged with appropriately, a company may recognise that its language and culture are understood and appreciated and the provider may become a partner, rather than just a service.

The Commission may consider identifying pockets of strength in doing this, to model an approach that may be disseminated across the sector.

General conclusions

The two issues addressed in this paper – the development of functional skills; and employer-provider partnerships in vocational learning, are interrelated.

Effective practice in both requires good leadership – to create the culture and the impetus to form partnerships, whether between education providers and employers, or between functional skills specialists and vocational tutors. Partnerships are built on mutual self-interest; trust established over time by working together; and a willingness to learn by mistakes to move the common endeavour forward.

Individuals need adequate levels of English and maths in order to study, especially beyond level 3; employers need staff who have adequate levels of English and maths, at least to level 2, to work effectively. And the country needs to continue to build a highly skilled workforce, able to attract investment and compete in international markets.

Companies, especially SMEs, need the help of education and training providers to keep their staff up to date; training providers need employers to send staff for training and keep them in business. Providers also need the help of employers to update vocational tutors’ skills, and to provide suitable work placements for learners.

So there is a lot of mutual self-interest in forming partnerships, and what is sometimes lacking is leadership: partnerships do not just happen – they are consciously built, over time, by leaders and their promotion and valuing of partnership working by vocational teachers and trainers as leaders themselves who see the need and work towards meeting it.

The leaders best placed to form partnerships are the senior managers of colleges, many of whom already take this role seriously. The LSIS Principals Qualifying Programme (which became the Executive Leadership Development Programme, to encompass leadership of work-based providers) did, among other things, address how leaders are outward-facing towards employers and communities, as well as inward-facing; and how they lead in learning, such as developing functional skills, as well as in controlling resources.
Sadly, the requirement for first-time principals to take the programme ended in 2010, but it did have the potential to raise the quality of leadership in the sector and this was recognised by Ofsted.

Similarly, the future is not known of the LSIS English and maths support programme which, as respondents to this research attested, has done much to help providers deliver functional skills effectively. The Commission may wish to consider how leadership in the sector may be developed, after LSIS closes; and how particular initiatives, such as the development of functional skills, may be supported.

As this report shows, there is good practice in the sector, in developing functional skills and in employer-provider engagement; however, this good practice is patchy. Ofsted’s annual report 2011/12 showed that there are sectoral weaknesses to address and that, in particular, high levels of leadership are needed to address these.

Markets may contribute to driving down costs and improving efficiency; however, whether they alone can deliver good-quality public services is debatable. If colleges recognise a social duty in a deprived area, as exemplified in case study 1, that duty may transcend straightforward cost-benefit economics. IfL’s preliminary report to the Commission mentioned that it may make no commercial sense for an SME to train staff if it can poach from another company, yet for the country as a whole training makes good, commercial sense. As seen in the way that many vocational tutors will keep up to date in their own time if they can, acting out of pride in their skills, public servants do often act in ways that transcend market forces.

Beyond market forces, it remains to be seen what catalysts will exist to ensure that vocational training providers transcend sectoral and sectarian boundaries to forge mutually beneficial partnerships with local communities and employers, and across college departments to develop functional skills. Partnership working requires leaders with the vision and the energy to create operational systems that make teamwork and partnership possible, and that make good use of the main resource of any learning provider – people and especially vocational teachers. Professional development of staff is needed to help them support learners, work in teams to deliver functional skills, engage with employers, and keep up to date.

Leadership is essential to accomplish this; but leaders too need support and possibly some training about what to lead and how. Managing resources is not the same as leadership, which needs courage, vision, and a willingness to take measured risks – qualities that some leaders already display.
References


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Appendices

Appendix 1: Acknowledgements

The researchers wish to thank the 120 busy people who gave generously of their time to submit extensive written evidence to phase one of the research.

Thanks particularly to the 78 teachers and trainers and the 26 vocational learners who attended regional seminars.

Thanks also to the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) for its assistance; and to staff at IfL for setting up and facilitating the seminars and for their professional input throughout.

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Appendix 2: Features of ‘embedded’ provision

1. Vocational and literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) teaching are physically integrated, i.e. taught during the same timetabled sessions.

2. Vocational and LLN teaching are undertaken by dual or multi-skilled tutors.

3. Vocational and LLN classes are run by the same department.

4. LLN teaching is linked to practical, vocational content and activities.

5. The vocational materials are adapted or differentiated to take account of different LLN levels and needs.

6. LLN materials are contextualised for the vocational area.

7. Initial or diagnostic assessment contributes to the integration of LLN into vocational teaching.

8. The use of ILPs or other forms of ongoing formative assessment contributes to the integration of LLN into vocational teaching.

9. The vocational subject is taught with differentiation according to the LLN needs of learners.

10. Formal shared planning in officially allocated time between vocational staff, LLN staff and ALS staff, where applicable, supports integration of LLN into vocational teaching.

11. Informal shared planning without officially allocated time between vocational staff, LLN staff and ALS staff, where applicable, supports integration of LLN into vocational teaching.

12. Vocational staff, LLN staff and ALS staff, where applicable, work as a team.

13. Vocational and LLN teachers have shared aims for the holistic development of the learners.

14. LLN teachers have shared aims [with the vocational tutors] for the holistic development of the learners.

15. LLN are seen as essential in the development of learners’ professional identity and for success in their vocational area.

16. LLN development is considered in principle to be relevant to all students, not only as necessary for those who are identified with ‘BS/ES’ needs.

17. LLN development is treated in practice as relevant to all students or as necessary only for those who are identified with LLN needs.

18. LLN teachers share vocational department objectives for the students.

19. LLN teachers are viewed by staff and students as contributing to learners’ vocational aspirations.

20. LLN teachers understand and engage with the vocational area as part of their work.

21. Vocational teachers understand and engage with LLN as part of their work.

22. LLN teachers are willing to develop their skills in relation to the vocational area.

23. Vocational teachers are willing to develop their skills in relation to LLN.

24. LLN teachers value the work of vocational teachers.

25. Vocational teachers value the work of LLN teachers.

26. The staff development policy and provision within, and available to, the college support the integration of LLN with vocational areas.

27. Departmental and institutional managers and policies support embedded provision in principle.


29. Organisational arrangements support embedded provision.

30. Resourcing and working conditions support embedded provision.
Appendix 3: Wolf appendix on functional skills

“Functional skills, as developed and delivered, are conceptually incoherent. The idea is that English and mathematics (and IT) should be ‘embedded’ in real life examples that are related to the vocational course that someone is studying and to ‘real life’. This is actually very difficult to do, because it demands that the teacher of the subject knows a great deal about a wide range of contexts, and can develop high quality materials for each.

Some of the best pedagogy achieves it, but as a recipe for a mass system it is highly ambitious and demanding. The alternative to having specialist teachers grapple with multiple contexts is to ‘embed’ the teaching in the vocational classes. That way, as we have discovered in a number of previous occasions, they embed to the point of vanishing.

Vocational teachers know about vocational subjects. They are not maths or English teachers. And if teaching maths and English were so easy that they could just be slipped into other lessons as an extra, why would so many young people be struggling with the subjects and failing their GCSEs?

If teachers do succeed in using a wide range of realistic contexts and making lessons relevant to students’ other courses they will, in any case, then hit a major problem. They may be delivering large numbers of different contexts in different styles. Their students are taking a central examination, with one set of questions, the same for every candidate. This is not a soluble problem. If functional skills are to have any currency, they have to involve some form of external, standardised assessment. And if they do that, then they cannot be true to the original concept. They become a set of qualifications with a centrally set syllabus, like any other, to be judged as good or bad on the basis of coverage, and the quality and credibility of assessments. This is not a circle which can be squared.

Appendix 4: Additional links to LSIS functional skills materials

LSIS English and Maths Support Programme

A link to recent examples of delivering functional skills: www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/25953

LSIS also has action research projects running, with films of principled practice, some of which are relevant to this report: www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/23561

There are numerous case studies on the Excellence Gateway, which are an outcome of LSIS regional activity delivered through the English and Maths Support Programme. The case studies describe the role of the LSIS Improvement Partner and illustrate how providers have worked together to support a whole-organisation approach to embedding English and maths.

The case studies reflect approaches taken by providers from a wide range of settings and contain good examples of the outcomes and impact that the Improvement Partner model has achieved.

East Midlands: www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=321347


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