

## **Delivering *Skills for Life***

### **FACT SHEET 3 – Delivering Embedded literacy, language (English for Speakers of Other Languages - ESOL) and numeracy in post-16 vocational programmes**

**May 2010**

**Originally published as Fact Sheet 8 in September 2007 by the Learning and Skills Council, the purpose of this fact sheet is to define embedded literacy, language (ESOL) and numeracy; highlight the research which outlines the positive benefits of delivering embedded literacy, language or numeracy learning in vocational programmes; and clarify how the Skills Funding Agency funds this type of delivery and how to record it on the Individualised Learner Record (ILR).**

#### **Readership**

1 Skills Funding Agency colleagues; colleges and other providers: directors responsible for curriculum development; senior managers and managers responsible for literacy, ESOL, numeracy and vocational qualification provision; managers responsible for Management Information Systems (MIS); teachers and tutors of literacy, ESOL, numeracy and vocational programmes; Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted); Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS); colleagues responsible for literacy, ESOL, numeracy and vocational provision.

#### **Structure**

2 The fact sheet has two sections. Section one defines what is meant by the term embedded and looks at research that outlines the positive benefits of delivering embedded (or integrated) Skills for Life (a literacy, language (ESOL) and numeracy learning) within a vocational programme. It highlights the impact it can have on retention and achievement rates and the attitudes of learners. It also highlights the additional capacity building support that is available to help providers deliver embedded provision. Section 2 clarifies how embedded delivery is currently funded by the Skills Funding Agency and recorded on the Individualised Learner Record (ILR).

3 This fact sheet has been prepared by the Foundation Skills team at the Skills Funding Agency. For further clarification providers should, in the first instance, contact their Account Manager.

## Section One: Embedded literacy, language (ESOL) and numeracy in post-16 vocational programmes

### Background

4 This section aims to set out what we mean by embedded delivery and highlight the research that has been undertaken by the National Research and Development Agency for literacy and numeracy (NRDC) which demonstrates the positive benefits of embedded Skills for Life delivery. It also outlines the capacity building support that is available to providers through the Skills for Life Improvement programme.

5 Many practitioners believe that, where a learners' main goal is to undertake and achieve a vocational or other programme, rather than a Skills for Life programme, the most effective way of providing learners with effective literacy, language or numeracy learning opportunities is to embed or integrate this teaching and learning within vocational or recreational study and delivery. Whilst this may be true, the research suggests that this practice has not been systematically developed or supported.

6 The practice of integrating or embedding literacy, language or numeracy into vocational study is not new. It has been a focus of the Skills for Life Strategy and more recently the [\*Leitch review of skills: Prosperity for all in the global economy - world class skills\*](#). The Leitch report states that in order to increase the required rate of improvement in the literacy and numeracy skills of adults, provision will need to be delivered “both through specific basic skills qualifications and ‘embedding’ functional literacy and numeracy within other qualifications”.

8 Embedded has become a widely used term in relation to Skills for Life delivery, but there are often different interpretations of what this means in practice. For funding and recording purposes the Skills Funding Agency defines embedded (or integrated) Skills for Life teaching and learning as follows:

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

9 The National Research and Development Centre for literacy and numeracy (NRDC) were commissioned to undertake a series of research projects to look at embedded teaching and learning in 2006. One key research project explored the impact that delivering embedded literacy, language and numeracy had on the retention of learners on programmes, the achievement of both vocational and literacy, ESOL and numeracy qualifications and learner attitudes.

10 The report of this research titled “[\*You wouldn't expect a maths teacher to teach plastering...Embedding literacy, language and numeracy in post-16 vocational programmes – the impact on learning and achievement\*](#)” is available on NRDC's website [www.nrdc.org.uk](http://www.nrdc.org.uk). Details of other research projects and case studies NRDC have conducted on embedded delivery are also available on this site.

## **You wouldn't expect a maths teacher to teach plastering, so why expect a plastering teacher to teach maths?**

11 The NRDC research focused on learners undertaking a vocational course. It did not attempt to compare more general discrete literacy, language (ESOL) or numeracy provision with embedded provision. The study concerned itself with the progress of learners whose primary motivation is vocational, and who may or may not acknowledge their literacy, ESOL or numeracy needs. It involved 15 Further Education colleges and one large training provider located in five regions, delivering a combined total of 79 vocational programmes.

12 The research recognised that there are no fixed models of embedding and so it classified courses according to a range of features of embedding. However, the research highlighted some key features which contributed to the success and quality of the embedded delivery of literacy, language and numeracy provision. The research reported that these features are important if embedded provision is to help deliver effective improvements in learner's retention, achievement and attitudes. These key features include:

- Teamwork between literacy, ESOL and numeracy teachers and vocational teachers
- Staff understandings, values and beliefs
- Aspects of teaching and learning that connect literacy, ESOL and numeracy to vocational content
- Policies and organisational features at institutional level

### **Teamwork between literacy, ESOL and numeracy teachers and vocational teachers**

13 Giving one teacher dual responsibility for teaching both the vocational subject and Skills for Life learning is often seen as the route to full embedding. However, adult literacy, ESOL and numeracy are complex areas to teach and the research highlighted that where one teacher had responsibility for teaching both subjects, learners are less likely to succeed with their literacy, ESOL or numeracy qualifications. In fact, learners taught by non-specialist Skills for Life teachers were twice as likely to fail in these circumstances. It also reported that learners benefit from being taught by teams of staff each with their own different areas of expertise working closely together. Formal and informal shared planning time is important.

### **Staff understandings, values and beliefs**

14 Positive staff attitudes can make a real difference. The research highlighted features such as literacy, ESOL and numeracy teachers engaging with the vocational area and thus being positively viewed by staff and learners as contributing to learners' vocational aspirations. As well as vocational staff who understood and engaged with the literacy, language and numeracy elements as part of their work and were therefore willing to develop their skills in relation to literacy, language and numeracy.

15 In one large construction department, having a basic skills co-ordinator with a background in the building industry has been key to a change in

attitudes. The learning support and basic skills teachers undertake Construction courses, while the vocational staff see the relevance of literacy, language and numeracy. Working this way requires both interest and commitment, and has implications in terms of time for training, classroom observation and meetings. The evidence of the research, however, suggests that such efforts are repaid in terms of learners' achievements.

### **Policies and organisational features at institutional level**

16 For embedded delivery to be successful the research highlighted features that underline the importance of a whole organisation approach to embedding. Support for embedding from senior and middle managers through institution-wide policies makes it easier to direct resources in ways that will support embedded literacy, language and numeracy. In one college, an ad hoc group led by the vice principal was working to ensure the implementation of the college's Skills for Life framework for embedding on a practical and strategic level.

17 There is no single model of delivery. It is therefore important to identify and disseminate models of good practice. This is being undertaken by the Learning and Skills and Improvement Service (LSIS) through the Skills for Life Improvement Programme (paragraph 27 provides further details).

### **Positive impact on retention, achievement and success rates**

18 The findings of the study provide a clear and consistent message that vocational courses at Levels 1 and 2 in which literacy, ESOL or numeracy is embedded are linked to more positive outcomes than courses for which the literacy, ESOL or numeracy provision is separate.

19 The main outcomes of the research showed that embedded delivery has a positive impact on retention, achievement and success rates, as follows:

- Higher retention rates on vocational programmes, particularly at Level 2
- Success rates on embedded vocational courses were higher than non-embedded courses
- Increased learner achievement in literacy, ESOL and numeracy qualifications

20 The research showed that increased retention rates were more marked for courses at vocational level 2 and suggested that, for level 2 learners, making an explicit link between Skills for Life learning and the vocational subject can help to overcome stigma associated with literacy, ESOL and numeracy learning. It also helped learners to cope with their vocational course. It may be important to consider an embedded approach when supporting learners to complete and achieve their full level 2 qualification.

### **Impact of embedded delivery on learners attitudes**

21 The research highlighted that many young adults on vocational courses have negative attitudes towards the key skills courses that are often mandatory aspects of their programme. The study collected insights on the attitudes of learners regarding literacy, ESOL and numeracy content,

embedded provision and vocational identity. The main conclusion was that as the degree of embeddedness increased, learners became more likely to say that the course had prepared them well for work and it is important that educators make strong connections between Skills for Life provision, vocational success and personal development.

## **Conclusion and recommendations**

22 The findings of the study highlighted some important messages, in particular that vocational courses at Levels 1 and 2 where literacy, ESOL and numeracy is embedded are linked to more positive outcomes than provision where literacy, ESOL and numeracy is separate.

23 As we work towards the challenge of the Leitch ambitions, it is important that the lessons of this research are recognised, and that embedding of literacy, numeracy and ESOL within vocational subjects becomes the norm rather than the exception. However, this will require consistent change to many institutional and professional practices.

## **Skills for Life Support Programme – embedded delivery**

24 As the Skills for Life strategy progresses there will be an increased emphasis to deliver Skills for Life through an embedded approach. This will require increased support to colleges and providers to engage in this agenda and deliver effective quality assured programmes.

25 New units of assessment on using embedded approaches have been produced for awarding institutions to use in the creation of qualifications for teachers. These units will be available as options within initial teacher education qualifications and as modules of continuing professional development (CPD).

26 The current emphasis on whole-organisation approaches, that require organisations to change the culture of the organisation to give greater importance to Skills for Life and to the way they work in order to meet, more fully, their learners' needs, has to continue and be strengthened.

27 The Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) has responsibility for the management of the Skills for Life Support Programme. A new regionally managed and delivered programme is currently being commissioned by LSIS and will be available in each region from June 2010. This new programme will create a community of practice by identifying providers with high quality literacy, language and numeracy provision and through the allocation of funds enable them to become key components in a regional delivery model that offers support to other sector providers. Lead practitioners from selected effective providers will help build capacity for sustained self-improvement across the learning and skills sector by facilitating consultancy, continuing professional development and peer networking groups. Further details on the current LSIS Skills for Life Improvement Programme can be found at <http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/sflsp>

## **Section 2: Funding the embedded delivery of literacy, language (ESOL) and numeracy provision**

29 The embedded delivery of literacy, language and numeracy is fundable by the Skills Funding Agency. Full details on how to fund and record embedded delivery are outlined in Annex C of the *LSC Funding Guidance 2008/09: Principles, Rules and Regulations in 2008/09*. Embedded delivery combines the delivery of literacy, ESOL or numeracy learning aims with other vocational or recreational learning aims.

30 There is currently no single learning aim recognised as an embedded literacy, ESOL or numeracy learning aim, however it follows that embedded delivery is an approach to curriculum delivery and involves at least one vocational learning aim and one literacy, ESOL or numeracy learning aim. What is required, therefore, is that the teaching of both the vocational and literacy, ESOL or numeracy learning aims are acknowledged and recorded.

31 For funding purposes, an embedded approach requires two or more learning aims to be in place; one for the vocational programme and the other for the additional literacy, ESOL or numeracy programme. Only the literacy, ESOL or numeracy (basic skills) learning aim and the number of guided learning hours (glh) associated with this teaching/learning will be eligible for the 1.4 programme weighting. The vocational learning aim will be paid at the usual programme weighting for that subject.

32 There is a generally held misconception that provided at least 50 per cent of a course comprises literacy, ESOL and numeracy, then the 1.4 uplift would apply to the whole course, sometimes referred to as the '50 per cent rule', this is not (nor has ever been) the case for embedded delivery. Each learning aim receives its related programme weighting.

33 There is also no rule about how much literacy, ESOL or numeracy has to be delivered to be regarded as an embedded programme. During the design of the embedded programme, practitioners need to establish how many guided learning hours of the vocational and Skills for Life programme will be delivered and the guided learning hours will be funded appropriately.

### **Recording embedded literacy, language (ESOL) or numeracy provision**

34 The teaching and learning of both the vocational and the literacy, ESOL or numeracy learning aims should be recorded. The ILR should contain a separate record for each learning aim. The learning aim reference (field A09) determines the appropriate programme weighting, as identified by the Learning Aims Database (LAD).

35 The start and planned end dates (fields A27 and A28) plus the number of glh (field A32), will determine the size of each learning aim and the overall learning programme. Where basic skills are embedded within a vocational learning aim, the overall size (glh) of the learning programme must be greater than the vocational learning aim delivered in a traditional manner, that is, on its own. Register details will confirm that the teaching has been delivered for both (all) learning aims involved in the programme.

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