



# Getting started with key skills and Skills for Life Guide to good practice



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## About the Key Skills Support Programme

These materials have been produced as part of the Key Skills Support Programme (KSSP).

The Key Skills Support Programme is funded by the Department for Education and Skills. Its main purpose is to help practitioners in training providers, schools and colleges to improve the quality of key skills and Skills for Life provision and to support the preparation of young people for the key skills qualifications.

DfES has appointed Learning for Work to manage the programme for the work-based route, and to work with those actively involved in the field to:

- ¥ improve the confidence and competence of teachers and trainers to deliver key skills and Skills for Life
- ¥ help a wide range of key skills and Skills for Life practitioners through a programme of events and training courses
- ¥ provide best practice materials for practitioners, employers and managers
- ¥ support practitioners as they foster progression from Skills for Life to key skills and other forms of learning.

## Acknowledgements

The Key Skills Support Programme would like to thank the following people and organisations for their help:

Case study sites: Academy Training, Bedford Training Group, Bexley Training Group, Capital Workforce, Gordon Franks, JHP Training, London Electronics College, Luton Borough Council, Nacro Ipswich, RW Rechere and Associates, Weir Training, WS Training, YMCA Training

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Graphic design by Eatcake Design, Bristol

Photography by James Barke, Bristol

Printed in England by Portishead Press, Bristol

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# Introduction

This guide focuses on introducing key skills and Skills for Life successfully to learners during the early stages of their programmes. It draws on the work of a research project that looked at providers who had addressed their apprentices' Skills for Life and key skills needs from the start and contains examples from their experience.

*To me [getting started with key skills] is an induction, saying what the key skills are and getting them timetabled straight away. If you achieve this, you'll find you have a guaranteed high success rate. If you don't, you'll find yourself talking about the value of key skills six months later, or during the second year, and you've lost the whole agenda by then. You have to do it at the beginning.*

**Key skills manager**

## What does getting started involve?

Getting started with key skills and Skills for Life involves:

- ✎ identifying learners' literacy and numeracy needs straight away and meeting them so that they don't prevent learners from achieving later on
- ✎ introducing key skills/Skills for Life to learners and creating opportunities for developing them at the beginning of their programmes
- ✎ making the skills central to all parts of learners' programmes by making relevant links to the job, the occupational area and/or any vocational qualifications
- ✎ establishing the value and credibility of the skills with staff, learners and employers, showing them that key skills learning is relevant and worthwhile.

Getting started early is *not* necessarily about finishing the qualifications early or getting them out of the way. It is important to tailor programmes to individual learner needs so that they learn and are assessed at appropriate points. It is also vital to make the most of the opportunities for learning and producing evidence in the workplace or vocational context.

## The research project

A Learning and Skills Network (LSN) development project worked with six centres where learners were introduced to literacy, numeracy and the wider key skills at the beginning of their programmes. This was in contrast to a range of previous practices including that of covering key skills as an addition at the end of programmes.

In 2005 researchers revisited the centres to gauge the impact of delivering key skills at the front end of learners' programmes. They found evidence of increased numbers of learners completing their portfolios more quickly and improved retention. Trainers saw the approach as fundamental in contributing to improved achievement and retention rates.

The results were published by the National Research and Development Centre (NRDC) in *Revisiting and re-evaluating. Putting good practice into practice: literacy, numeracy and key skills in apprenticeships* (NRDC May 2005). The report was sponsored by the QCA Convergence project and managed in association with LSN. It is referred to later in this guide as the NRDC Report.





## Why get started early?

Providers have found that addressing learners' needs up front capitalises on their enthusiasm at the beginning of their programmes and is an effective way of ensuring that they start achieving. This, in turn, sends a strong message to learners that key skills or Skills for Life are an essential part of their programmes and that they need the skills for their jobs and to complete their qualifications. They also provide generic skills that are transferable to any learning or vocational context.

### Apprentices

Key skills are an integral part of all Apprenticeship programmes. Introducing apprentices to key skills at the start makes sure that they see the links to the job, vocational training and the technical certificate. It also builds on any achievements from school and puts these into the workplace context. And developing the key skills makes learners better able to acquire the vocational skills and put these into practice at work.

### Entry to Employment (E2E)

E2E learners may be working towards Skills for Life and/or key skills qualifications. Many E2E learners will have had difficult school experiences. Identifying and meeting their skills needs helps them make the most of their programmes. Difficulties with literacy and numeracy can be barriers to employability and achievement generally, so it's important to deal with these early on.

### National Employment Training Programme (NETP)

NETP learners may have been outside mainstream education and training for a while. Some will be aiming towards Skills for Life qualifications, some vocational qualifications and some both. It is vital to identify literacy or numeracy needs during initial assessment and build these into learning plans. It is also important to take away the fear factor by encouraging early success. Linking literacy and numeracy and key skills to workplace performance will make it easier for these learners to achieve any vocational qualifications and will help them succeed in their job.



Here's how one provider has put this into practice.

## Bexley Training Group (BTG)

### **Establishing value and credibility**

BTG has moved from a generic induction aimed at all learners to a longer and more vocationally focused programme. Training Manager Linda Portis says:

*From the moment learners come for interview, the entire package of learning is made clear to them.*

### **Making key skills central**

Learners come into the training centre for 1 week prior to starting their placements. During this time they look at their frameworks, as well as health and safety and equal opportunities. BTG has adopted a holistic approach to learning and assessment: in each occupational area learners are shown how the NVQ, key skills and technical certificate interrelate in the work they do. For example, in Business Administration, learners undertake individual and group activities that demonstrate how the administrative function — such as note taking for a meeting — covers aspects of both the NVQ and key skills.

### **Identifying needs**

During the initial assessment and induction processes tutors work with learners to identify their literacy, numeracy and key skill levels. This process allows trainers to focus on their individual learning needs. As Linda says:

*There are so many fantastic resources online that you can meet individual needs without too much trouble.*

### **Meeting needs**

At the end of the induction week, learners have an individual tutorial to review initial assessment and to agree specific targets for the next 6 weeks. This gives an indication of learning to be done both on and off the job. BTG has developed a Training Implementation Plan that they use with learners for target setting and review. Learners generally see their tutors once a week for off-the-job training and reviews are held every 6 weeks. BTG makes a point of negotiating training options with both learners and employers.

### **Continuing professional development**

BTG wants all staff to qualify as both teachers and assessors. About 80% of existing staff have a teaching qualification and 10% are currently working towards their Cert Ed. All staff have done the core curriculum training for literacy and numeracy and most are working to achieve their own key skills at level 3. Linda says that this has been essential for the success of the organisation's holistic approach to learning and assessment, as staff need to be able to understand the demands of key and vocational skills in an integrated context.

# Getting started in practice

This guide focuses on the key issues that will ensure that you can get started effectively with key skills and Skills for Life.



## Getting the message right (see page 6)

Learners succeed at key skills and Skills for Life when they see them as a valuable and credible part of their programmes. This means showing them how the skills are useful and relevant and building positive attitudes among staff, learners and employers.



## Planning your delivery model (see page 8)

Getting started with key skills and Skills for Life involves planning both how to start developing the key skills and Skills for Life and how to embed key skills learning into each vocational area.



## Working together as a team (see page 10)

It's important that both vocational staff and specialist teachers know the part they play in introducing key skills and Skills for Life and that they are competent and confident to carry out their role.



## Joining up learning (see page 12)

Key skills and Skills for Life learning is sometimes treated separately from the rest of the programme. It is vital that it is fully integrated to show learners how the skills underpin all parts of their programmes and are relevant to their success.



### **Maintaining quality** (see page 22)

There must be systems in place for monitoring and evaluating your provision, including any subcontractors, and ensuring that administrative and recording systems are working effectively.



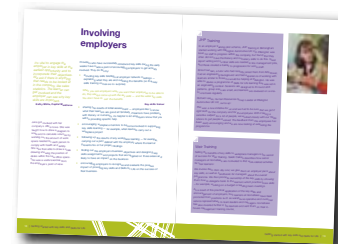
### **Introducing the tests** (see page 20)

Research shows that learners benefit from being entered for tests at the right time and for the right reasons. It also shows that receiving instant feedback following initial assessment and practice tests increases learners' motivation to learn.



### **Involving employers** (see page 18)

Employers need to know from the outset that key skills or Skills for Life are part of the programme and how these skills will make employees more effective. Involving employers in projects that benefit the business will help them to recognise the value of the skills.



### **Making early success visible** (see page 16)

Ensuring that learners achieve positive results early on allows you to capitalise on success and maintain motivation.



### **Engaging learners** (see page 14)

Doing things the way they were done at school doesn't switch learners on to learning key skills and Skills for Life. Using a range of interesting, innovative and enjoyable activities with learners, including linking them to the NVQ or occupational area, helps to motivate them.





# Getting the message right

Learners succeed at key skills and Skills for Life when they see them as a valuable and credible part of their programmes. In particular, learners are more likely to be positive about key skills when they grasp how they relate to their occupational area.

*When our researchers discussed key skills with a large group of first year apprentices, they displayed a high degree of self-confidence and assertiveness. They were also able to explain why certain key skills were relevant to their chosen trade.*

**Executive summary (NRDC Report, p. 5)**

*Once I get into a garage I'll have to write reports and need to be able to spell. I'm going to have to talk to lots of different people. I think my skills are getting better. My confidence has improved a lot. I've met a lot of new people and learned a lot of different skills.*

**Bruno, apprentice**

*I don't shy away from using the technical terms with learners. It's how you do it that counts. I don't usually show them the standards — I introduce them bit by bit, using specific activities then making the links. I'm very clear about which bit of the key skill I want them to know and understand though.*

**Key skills tutor**

Three things are important.

- Introduce the skills in a positive way — they are, after all, crucial to all jobs and indeed in all areas of our lives. Employers consistently place the key skills — particularly aspects of communication, working with others and improving own learning and performance — at the top of their list of requirements in new employees.
- Show how they are relevant to the trade or occupation. Even when specific aspects of a skill are not commonly used within the occupation, this should not devalue the skill as a whole.
- Help learners become familiar with what the skills involve and enable them to handle the language associated with them.

## A series of events

Introducing learners to key skills and Skills for Life is a continuous process made up of a series of events, not just one session at induction. Learners need to see the relevance of the skills in all parts of their programmes. This means:

- incorporating them into marketing literature alongside NVQs and other qualifications
- making them part of the selection process
- integrating them into your existing induction programme.

## Staff attitudes

Staff attitudes are significant: unless all staff — and employers — see the relevance of key skills or Skills for Life, their learners are likely to have a negative attitude to developing them. Centres which have addressed this successfully allocate time and resources to specialist staff and encourage team approaches.

## Avoid the deficit model

Literacy and numeracy are sometimes presented to learners in a negative way — albeit unintentionally — for example, We can help you with any reading and writing problems rather than Would some work on spelling technical words be useful? Research shows that learners respond better to positive messages where key skills and/or Skills for Life are shown to be of direct benefit to them in their jobs or careers.

One provider with apprentices in heating and ventilation emphasises the significance of key skills for career development. They have a gallery of photographs and career portraits for each of their trainers and managers on site. This serves as a positive example to learners, showing them how combining technical and key skills has led to their trainers' and managers' current achievements.

*Most of our apprentices have had a Saturday job in a salon and we use this as the basis for introducing the key skills when we interview them. They come in for an Introduction to the salon week and we introduce key skills learning as part of the main tasks — like working with their colleagues; greeting clients and making refreshments; entering information on the client database; and salon hygiene and cleanliness.*

**Hairdressing trainer**

The specialist tutor in one construction centre spends considerable time developing ideas for sessions. Consequently, the teaching of key skills in the initial training appears central to the occupational training rather than peripheral.

One construction trainer commented that they didn't understand what formulae in a spreadsheet were until they saw learners adding up columns of figures on the laptop and asked what they were doing.

*The key skills tutor and I have since put together a project for them to monitor the materials budget when they're in the workshop.*





# Planning your delivery model

Getting started with key skills and Skills for Life involves planning both how to start developing the key skills and Skills for Life and how to embed key skills learning into each vocational area. Such planning is likely to be most effective if the whole team is involved.

*The combination of front-end with embedded delivery can be a particularly effective model for training. This approach prioritises key skills, making it clear that such skills are central to all portfolios, whilst drawing on all the advantages of embedded provision where key skills are delivered throughout the vocational course within the contexts provided by the vocational training.*

**Summary of findings  
(NRDC Report, p. 21)**

## Embedded and front-end approaches

Providers are more likely to be successful when they combine embedded and front-end approaches.

- **Embedded delivery** is where key skills and Skills for Life are taught and learnt within the context of the wider learning programme. In occupations where learners go straight into the workplace or workshop, this means that skills learning needs to be linked directly to the day-to-day tasks and to the employer's objectives.
- **Front-end delivery** is where learners start their key skills or Skills for Life learning up front. Key skills teaching and learning makes up a significant part of teaching and learning during the early months, then gradually lessens as time goes on.

Flexibility is the key when planning how to introduce key skills and Skills for Life to learners as you need to take account of the demands of different occupational areas and individual learning needs. How you combine the two approaches will depend on your sector, the employers you work with and the needs of your learners. So it is well worth taking time as a team to plan the learning because this will pay dividends later in terms of increased retention and achievement rates.

## Team planning

It's important that everyone involved in teaching and learning key skills and Skills for Life knows the order in which learners will master the different skills and tasks involved in the job, the NVQ and/or the technical certificate. You'll need to plan ahead for this. Planning as a team involves key skills and vocational staff in each sector getting together to:

- map teaching, learning and practice sessions to any existing schemes of work linked to the NVQ or technical certificate

- identify the main vocational and/or work tasks that learners will be learning and making formal links to the key skills
- share ideas and good practice.

## Team teaching

Team teaching is an effective way to ensure that key skills and Skills for Life learning takes place during the early weeks. This can happen in a variety of ways.

- **Joint sessions.** The key skills specialist works alongside the vocational tutor, helping with key skills as learners are taught vocational skills and knowledge. In this way the key skills tutor can have a teaching input into the vocational session — particularly where learners can't carry out a particular task without the key skill.
- **Coaching: off the job.** Where learners have specific literacy and numeracy needs, specialists come into vocational sessions and coach learners as necessary. This may be particularly important for learners with dyslexia or dyscalculia.
- **Coaching: on or near the job.** Again, where learners have specific literacy and numeracy needs, specialists come into the workplace and coach learners using a project or work task.

*We identify what the benefits are for our trade — why we need ICT skills; why they need to do presentations to colleagues and clients; the importance of day-to-day communications on site; and reading and understanding complicated drawings. We show our learners how they will be using such skills.*

**Heating and ventilation lead trainer**

### London Electronics College

London Electronics College has formalised its approach to team teaching and has five Skills for Life tutors responsible for language, literacy, ICT and numeracy. The tutors are timetabled to work alongside the vocational or subject tutors. The aim is to raise learners skills while working in the vocational context. Angela Manser, the Skills for Life team leader, has a number of tips on how to make team teaching work.

- ¥ Be aware of what's on the lesson plan for that day.
- ¥ Have a profile of the group and who needs extra support.
- ¥ Accept that you can't always help, especially if it's a highly technical session.
- ¥ Avoid disrupting the class if you're talking to a learner.
- ¥ Develop a good relationship with the vocational tutor.
- ¥ Be flexible.

Rose Ali, the Skills for Life tutor at **Nacro Ipswich**, talks with vocational tutors every day and often works with them to support learners. Team teaching with Graham Burn, the mechanics tutor, helped each learner prepare a CV that was relevant for the motor trade. Rose has also discussed with Andrew Sykes, the ICT tutor, how the spell-check facility can help learners improve their spelling skills. Lubrication and catalytic converter are pretty difficult words, but not so daunting when the computer can be used to help practise spelling.

# Working together as a team

Successful providers make sure that everyone knows the part they play in introducing the key skills and that they are prepared for their role in terms of staff development. Vocational trainers don't have to be specialists in literacy or numeracy, but it helps enormously if they actively support key skills learning — teaching, recognising opportunities and picking up issues and passing these on. They are more likely to know how the skills are used in the job. In the same way, key skills specialists gain respect from both learners and vocational staff if they get involved in the vocational area and understand the key tasks and how these are taught and learned.

## The specialist tutor

*In one centre the key skills tutor had personally engaged in occupational skills training so that when necessary she could include practical demonstrations in her teaching. This engendered considerable respect and enhanced her ability to make the key skills relevant.*

**NRDC Report, p. 15**

*Our key skills tutors write assignments then get the vocational trainers to check them. We look on it as a collaborative exercise.*

**Training manager**

Key skills and Skills for Life specialists can get involved in the vocational area in several ways:

- meeting regularly with the vocational trainers once learners have started their programmes to discuss ways in which key skills learning can be reinforced during their training sessions
- participating in case conferences where they review individual learners' progress with individual tutors
- learning and using the language of the trade or occupation — perhaps by observing training sessions and taking part in occupational skills training to gain insight into the main vocational tasks and how learners acquire them
- going into the workplace, identifying opportunities for key skills learning and designing activities to meet these
- picking up on any gaps and duplication in key skills learning or training and making sure these are covered or avoided
- raising vocational trainers' awareness of the learning challenges faced by learners with dyslexia, dyscalculia and dyspraxia, the importance of multi-sensory teaching and learning, and making them aware of simple strategies for supporting these learners to achieve.

## The vocational tutor

Success in introducing key skills and Skills for Life also depends upon the involvement of vocational staff and their active commitment to teaching and supporting the skills. However, vocational tutors may have concerns about this and may lack confidence in their abilities. So it is important to be clear about exactly what they are expected to do. The vocational trainer can support key skills and/or Skills for Life development by:

- ensuring that learners get the opportunity to put the skills into practice
- noticing occasions when a learner can't perform vital tasks because they are lacking these skills — such as a learner who wastes time and materials because of inaccurate measurements — and informing the key skills specialist
- knowing the teaching and learning methods used by learners and their literacy and numeracy tutors and using these during vocational sessions
- becoming aware of new or different ways of doing things, such as punctuating business letters, learning how to spell words or calculating decimals. For example, a specialist number teacher may help a learner to develop a strategy for calculating decimals. If their vocational tutor then asks the learner to do decimals in a different way, this will be confusing.

## CPD

All this is likely to call for continuing professional development (CPD) for staff. This may include:

- specialist training for those with overall responsibility for literacy, numeracy and key skills teaching
- training for vocational staff on how to support key skills/Skills for Life and specific learning disabilities within their vocational teaching
- commitment and active support from senior managers in developing an informed and positive culture towards these skills among staff and within the organisation generally
- awareness training or briefing for staff who recruit and select learners and/or employer liaison staff.

For more information, see the section on continuing professional development in the *Managing key skills and Skills for Life in work-based learning* handbook.



For prisoners undertaking Skills for Life learning as part of a resettlement package, vocational tutors worked in partnership with Skills for Life tutors to evaluate existing e-learning materials for use within vocational sessions. The Skills for Life tutors undertook some research to become familiar with vocational literacy and numeracy and the vocational tutors were provided with input on teaching literacy and numeracy skills. The tutors then team-taught vocational sessions and were able to provide a much more flexible and responsive learning environment.

At **Gordon Franks** new trainers join at least one of the initial key skills weeks. They do so as learners, and this is a positive experience for both them and the learners.



# Joining up learning

Introducing key skills and Skills for Life should form a seamless part of the programme from the learner's point of view. In the past these skills have often been seen as an add-on and treated separately from the rest of learners' programmes, which often meant that learners didn't see the point of them. Learners need to see the skills as a central part of their programmes — and this affects initial assessment, induction and planning learning.

## Linking with initial assessment

Getting started early with key skills and Skills for Life has important implications for initial assessment. Indeed, some of the work you do with skills will form part of your initial assessment process — in particular, activities, observations and discussions with learners.

All apprentices at **Gordon Franks** have a fun week during which they undertake a wide range of activities that are both enjoyable and educational. The activities help introduce all the key skills and get learners to use them. They also provide opportunities for tutors to observe learners and gather information for initial assessment which feed into the learner's ILP.

Using a variety of initial assessment methods will help you get to know the strengths and weaknesses of each learner from the outset. This makes it much easier to set individualised activities with achievable targets so that learners can see signs of progress and completion after each session. It also helps learners to recognise their own strengths and weaknesses and to be involved in the process of evaluating their own performance, all of which are valuable wider key skills.

There is evidence that strong tracking of performance combined with comprehensive levels of recording at the beginning establishes a high degree of professionalism among staff and learners and that this, in turn, has a positive effect on learners' motivation to learn.

For more information, see the good practice guide *Improving initial assessment*.

## Making the most of induction

Effective induction is clearly a central part of getting started with key skills and Skills for Life. Within induction you can explain the importance of the skills and use activities that lend themselves to teaching and learning skills.

The types of activity you can use will depend on how you deliver induction. Some learners go straight into the workplace and are inducted on the job, some have a day's induction off the job in a small group, and others have a week's induction in a large group. The point is to make the most of what you've got.



## Bedford Training Group

Bedford Training Group holds group inductions off the job with learners from a variety of occupational areas. They see induction as a very active process. Learners complete ice-breaker activities to find out about each other and their chosen industry. As a group they play Name that tool, a game where they look at tools that are used in engineering. Trainer Des Roberts says:

*It's a good way for the learners to get to know the tutor and each other. They have to use teamworking, communication and problem solving skills in this exercise. It's also great for motivation.*

Trainers explain how the key skills contribute to a range of learning activities. For example, while they are reading information about fire equipment for health and safety, they are also developing their reading and understanding skills.

The section in this guide on Designing activities has more ideas for possible induction activities.

## Planning learning

Providers who introduce key skills early also do the following:

- **use ILPs effectively** by setting learning targets that are specific to learners' key skills and/or Skills for Life needs. Use SMART targets to make progress tangible — SMART targets are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound
- **timetable key skills learning** into the programme and have a detailed training schedule
- **have an organised scheme of work** with explicit aims and objectives. This is so that you know what's being taught and when, and that you are covering everything. Employers need to know about this too.

*I'm not excellent at reading and writing. Here they feed you it little bits at a time which adds up at the end. It goes into your head quicker.*

**Stephen, apprentice**

*We've introduced a schedule for up-front key skills training. Retention is no longer an issue for us. This year's results are brilliant compared to our fourth year apprentices. We're expecting 100% achievement for this year's cohort during their first year.*

**Heating and ventilation trainer**

# Engaging learners

*We did an ice-breaker where we had to talk about ourselves. It was good because you got to speak to different people, find out where they re from and make new friends.*

**Bruno, apprentice**

*We were treated like grown-ups. At school there s too many people telling you what to do. Here they give you your own space. You ve got to learn to be independent.*

**Stephen, apprentice**

*We have a range of activities that are fun and to the point. Our aim is to promote a positive experience of number and communication.*

**Skills for Life tutor**

If you can find ways to engage learners interest in key skills or Skills for Life at the beginning, they are more likely to want to acquire the skills, produce a portfolio and pass the test. This means thinking of interesting and enjoyable ways for them to learn and making the skills relevant to their chosen occupational area.

## Making it interesting

Many learners will have been through the education system and may see themselves as failures, particularly E2E learners or those with literacy and numeracy needs. It s helpful to think in terms of getting learners attention to start with. Adopting an adult approach and stressing how this is different from school will help.

- Avoid traditional classroom approaches. Doing things the way they were done at school doesn t switch learners on to key skills learning.
- Communicate in an adult-to-adult way.
- Develop collaborative relationships.
- Create learning environments that are closer to working life than school.
- Include enjoyable and meaningful activities as part of induction or initial assessment.

You will find ideas for activities in the Designing activities section of this guide (see page 25).

### Gordon Franks

Gordon Franks sees it as their job to release learners potential. To improve the confidence and self-esteem of their E2E learners, the organisation uses a circus juggler to run a workshop as part of initial assessment. Learners are taught simple tricks that they can perform competently by the end of the workshop. At the start of the session, learners are encouraged to let the balls fall. This illustrates in a fun way that it s OK to get things wrong. It also shows learners that they can improve and succeed with practice.

Another confidence-building session they use is a workshop run by an artist. All learners produce a simple painting — even those who insist they can t paint! The organisation uses this exercise to show learners that you don t always know what you can do unless you try, and that everyone has untapped potential.

## Ensuring that learning is vocationally relevant

Key skills and Skills for Life are not the main reasons why most learners join a programme. However, lack of these skills may mean that they are unable to develop their vocational or employability skills and progress in their chosen occupation. Showing them how the skills underpin their career development is therefore important to begin with. You need to link any key skills learning to the main tasks involved in the job, the NVQ and the technical certificate.

Finding out what they can already do, using this as a starting point and linking key skills learning to the job or the occupational area also helps to ensure that you don't go over old ground with learners.

If learners learn mainly in the workplace, your starting point is the day-to-day tasks they carry out. From here, you can identify any potential gaps in key skills coverage.

- A care apprentice, for example, may need to keep or update client records. This is a vital part of their job. It also requires key skills — possibly communication, ICT and working with others — and it will be relevant to NVQ units.
- A construction apprentice may need to measure up a job. Again, this is a vital occupational skill that involves key skills, particularly application of number, as well as NVQ units.

## Giving feedback

Feedback is vital in the early stages.

- Give positive reinforcements of learners' strengths and achievements during induction and early sessions and placements.
- In the first few weeks discuss with learners exactly what progress they have made and help them realise the distance they have travelled since the start.
- Pinpoint areas where progress hasn't been made and find out why.

Make sure that feedback is two-way. Invite feedback from learners to enable them to identify any on-course barriers to their progress and share any ideas they may have for improving the learning experience for themselves and others.



*I couldn't tell the time on the analogue clock. I never had the chance to tell anyone at school because I thought I might get the mick taken out of me. Here they've been teaching me one-to-one. I was clocking in late and early and I never realised, and Des thought it was a bit weird. Now, whenever I've got time, I come up here and Des takes his watch off and we tell the time. I told the time the other day — it was five past nine. I'm learning to add — it's helping my maths a lot.*

**Stephen, apprentice**



# Making early success visible

Developing key skills and/or Skills for Life early on helps to ensure that learners are able to progress through their programmes in a timely manner, and encourages them to gain their qualifications. Adopting this approach means that learners need to know that they are making progress in the skills from the outset. This significantly raises their levels of enthusiasm and motivation, making them more committed to the learning programme, and this, in turn, raises achievement and retention levels.

**Academy Training** produces a newsletter and brochure for learners and employers which celebrates achievements of individual learners.

*I've learnt so much being here so far. Here we've got the opportunity to do jobs and learn from them. If you get it wrong, they run you through it again — they don't moan about it. They just give you the help you need to understand it.*

**Chris, E2E learner**

Providers have made success visible by:

- entering learners for a test at the appropriate level and using the results to emphasise success
- stressing the positives that are shown up by initial assessment
- giving learners positive feedback on progress and achievement every time they complete a piece of work
- recognising small steps towards achievement of larger goals
- showing learners how key skills learning helps them achieve their overall targets and so making learning more relevant.

## YMCA Training, Croydon

Tell your learners 'Well done' every day, says Simon Forzani, Manager at YMCA Training, Croydon. This positive-thinking provider believes in praising learners and recognising their achievements every step of the way. Each month finishes with an awards ceremony. All learners receive a certificate for achievement over the previous month, whether that's completing a key skills assignment, learning how to work out the area of a rectangle or finishing project work for their NVQ.

The ceremony often becomes a party: at Halloween the learners enjoyed food and games as well as their certificates; at Christmas they went bowling before receiving their certificates. This connects learning with having fun. As Simon says:

*Even learners who have only been with us for a short time get a certificate; for some of these young people this will be the first time they've ever had recognition of their achievements.*

Having a monthly team quiz, when individuals work together in small teams to answer questions, indicates learning progress to the whole group and can identify to the tutor any areas that need further work.

You could ask learners to work in pairs or teams to write quizzes or tests for other learners in the group based on what they have all been learning. This allows learners to check their own learning as they create the quiz while providing the tutor with an opportunity to assess the learning taking place. It also provides a sense of fun and achievement at being able to take responsibility for learning activities.

Employers will be more positive about the skills if they are aware of achievements, so keep them informed about progress.

## Safety nets

Some learners may have specific difficulties, such as undiagnosed dyslexia.

Dyslexic tendencies can manifest themselves in different ways. *Developing literacy: supporting achievement* (NIACE 2005) lists some possible signs of difficulty. These include a persistent or severe problem with spelling easy or common words, even after practice, a marked difference between confidence and ability to express oneself in spoken and in written language, and difficulties in remembering the image of a word (i.e. what it looks like). For more information, consult the publication above, which can be obtained from NIACE at [www.niace.org.uk](http://www.niace.org.uk).

There is evidence from providers that diagnosing such problems early on enables them to provide specific help. If you suspect that a learner may be dyslexic, you might decide to seek specialist advice and/or support.

Most learners know already when they have problems with literacy and numeracy, so tackling their needs early is usually a positive step to achievement later on, particularly when there is ongoing support and regular review of progress. Indeed, such support can help to increase self-esteem — although you need to take care that it does not limit learners' belief in their own capabilities.

Successes in key skills training in one construction provider have attracted attention within the industry, within training circles and in the local media. Articles are displayed prominently on notice-boards for all to see, showing learners that what they are doing is noteworthy and helping to create a sense of pride in their achievements. In addition, their tutor has a high profile within the company, in contrast to some organisations where key skills is perceived to be on the margins of the overall training programme.

*Dyslexia is commonly described as 'a difficulty with processing written language'. However, there are many definitions of dyslexia but no clear consensus. There is considerable debate around whether it can be 'distinguished in practice from other possible causes of adults' literacy difficulties'.*

**NRDC Research Review 17, quoted in *Developing literacy: supporting achievement* (NIACE lifelines in adult learning 18, NIACE 2005)**



# Involving employers

*It's vital to engage the employer in key skills at the earliest opportunity and to incorporate their objectives. We ask if there is anything that needs to be looked at in the company, like sales statistics. The learner can get involved and the employer can see why key skills are important.*

**Kathy White, Capital Workforce**

Jane got involved with her company's office move. She was taught how to draw a diagram to scale and to calculate volumes by working out the amount of work space needed for each person to comply with health and safety. She was then able to draw a scale drawing showing the position of desks within the new office space. This was a useful exercise from the employer's point of view.

Providers who have successfully introduced key skills during the early weeks have made a point of encouraging employers to get actively involved. They do this by:

- including key skills briefings at employer network meetings — explaining what they are and outlining the benefits (so that key skills training comes as no surprise)

*When you ask employers what you want their employees to be able to do, they always come up with the key skills — and the wider key skills. You don't have to sell the benefits.*

## **Key skills trainer**

- sharing the results of initial assessment — employers like to know what their learners are good at! Similarly, if learners have problems with literacy or numeracy, it's helpful to let employers know that you will be providing specific help
- encouraging workplace mentors to become involved in supporting key skills learning — for example, when learners carry out a workplace project
- following up the results of any workplace learning — for example, carrying out a joint debrief with the employer where the learner presents his or her project findings
- finding out the employer's business objectives and designing key skills assignments and projects that are targeted on these areas and likely to have an impact on the business
- encouraging employers to recognise and evaluate the positive impact of providing key skills and Skills for Life on the success of their business.

## JHP Training

In an employer training pilot scheme, JHP Training in Birmingham started working with Pilkington Automotive UK Ltd. Pilkington was keen for staff to progress within the company, but found that they often did not have the literacy and numeracy skills to do this. Good report writing and number skills are needed in line management jobs, and these created a barrier to progression for some staff.

Ernie Fountain, a tutor who had recently joined them from MG Rover, had an engineering background and had experience of working with learners similar to those he would be helping at Pilkington. He was able to devise a programme of Skills for Life learning that was set in an engineering context. Sessions are designed to fit round shift patterns, group sizes are small, and learners are reviewed on a one-to-one basis regularly.

Richard Leese, Human Resources Group Leader at Pilkington Automotive UK Ltd, sums up:

*This was a new initiative for us and we had to be sure that we got it right both for the company and for the employee. With it being a sensitive subject for a lot of people, we worked closely with our Trade Unions to get people involved. The feedback from the employees has been really encouraging and we are now looking at extending the programme.*



## Weir Training

Selling the benefits of key skills to workplace managers is the secret of success for Weir Training. Sarah Caines describes how senior managers at Homebase are motivated to find work-related activities for their learners:

*We involve them from day one; we give them an employer pack about key skills, as well as handbooks for managers about the overall programme. We then promote ownership of the key skills by showing them how to delegate tasks to the learners which practise those skills – for example, working on a budget or leading team meetings.*

As a result of this practical application of the key skills and encouragement of employers, four learners at Homebase have been promoted from positions such as warehouse operative and customer service representatives to team leaders and managers. Homebase has also invested further in the learners and sent them on their in-house management training course.



# Introducing the tests

Research shows that early achievement of the test can be a positive and motivating experience for learners. It's important, though, that learners are fully prepared before you enter them.

*Our learners are highly motivated to take the real test when they have practised and feel confident. About 86% of our learners are successful on their first attempt. It's about choosing the right time for the learner to enter. Putting them in too early would have a detrimental effect.*

**Linda Portis, Training Manager, BTG**

## When is a learner ready?

Deciding when to put a learner in for the test involves judging both how confident they feel and whether or not they have the know-how they need to succeed.

### **Learners are likely to be ready if:**

- they've had plenty of opportunities to practise and apply the skills
- they tell you that they'd like to give the test a go (and you agree with them)
- you've given them plenty of test practice
- they are entered at the right level.

### **Learners probably won't be ready if:**

- they have significant learning needs
- they are in the middle of learning the basics
- they are unprepared to take the test.

Adopting an 'early bird' approach to Skills for Life and key skills achievement is bringing results for two providers in South London: **RW Rechere and Associates** and **YMCA Training**, Croydon. Both organisations offer their learners training and opportunities to achieve the national literacy and numeracy or key skills tests while on Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes. This gives the learners a head start when they commence their Apprenticeships in Early Years Care, Beauty Therapy or Music Technology.

At **WS Training** in Bury St Edmunds key skills are tackled during the early stages of learners programmes and there is evidence that they are being completed earlier. This has had a positive effect on framework completion.

The organisation uses online learning to develop learners' skills. They report that young people respond particularly well to online learning as they associate it with recreational activity rather than school learning.

## Using tests for learning

You don't always have to put the learner in for the test 'for real' during the early stages. Instead, you can use the test as a motivational tool or to help you and your learners identify where they are or what they need to do next.

You could download sample tests from the QCA website or from your awarding body. Or you could use the practice tests provided by Move On. See the 'Where next?' section of this guide for more details.

You could also produce your own contextualised questions. Bear in mind, though, that the test contains generic questions, so learners will need practice in answering these too. If you are using tests for learning purposes, you could introduce just a few questions at a time to begin with so that you do not overwhelm your learners.

For more information, see the good practice guide *Preparing for the level 1 and 2 tests*.

**Bedford Training Group** has developed in-house paper-based tests for the communication and application of number key skills. They have contextualised tests to specific industry contexts to make them more relevant to learners.

Providing online learning with specialist software support such as Texthelp can make a significant difference to the success of learners with dyslexia, giving them the confidence to demonstrate their learning in written form with less anxiety about spelling. Increased practice and confidence with some individual support can enable learners with specific learning disabilities to achieve.

# Maintaining quality

Maintaining quality is about setting standards for skills delivery and having systems in place to ensure that you meet these standards. It's also about ensuring that administrative and recording systems are in place and working effectively. Quality systems are also important if you work with subcontractors.

## Creating systems

You need systems in place to tell you how well learners are progressing with key skills. This is so that both you and the learners know where you are, you know whether or not your teaching is effective and you can pick up on any gaps in delivery.

If you don't collect information from the start, you can't evaluate your value added. So you need systems to record learners' starting points as well as their progress and achievements.

## Working with other people

Good internal communication is one of the keys to maintaining quality.

Answer the following questions as honestly as you can. You are aiming for a 'yes' in all cases.

- Do we share the results of initial assessment with everyone who needs to know — and do they share similar information with us?
- Are there formal procedures (such as regular meetings) for discussing key skills/Skills for Life provision and learners' progress in the early stages?
- If I asked those involved in early delivery of key skills or Skills for Life about a named learner's progress, could they tell me?
- Do departments/teams talk to each other about individual learners from the outset?
- Do we record learners' progress in key skills/Skills for Life learning (not just assessment)?
- Do we include learners in our quality procedures (for example, asking their opinions and acting on these)?
- Do we encourage all staff to undertake CPD activities?

*We carried out an audit of our systems and discovered that much of the non-achievement was down to a lack of recording on our part. Learners were learning key skills and producing evidence to standard, but we didn't know about it. We've since introduced specific documentation for tracking progress in key skills.*

**Key skills coordinator**





If you've answered 'no' to any of the questions, you will need to take action in that area.

## Managing subcontractors

If you subcontract any of your key skills and/or Skills for Life teaching to another organisation, you will need systems to ensure that their work dovetails with yours, and that they meet the quality standards you agree with them.

*We have a dedicated member of staff to manage our relationships with external partners. This includes monitoring the quality of provision.*

**Liz Somers, Director,  
Academy Training**

### Luton Borough Council (LBC)

Having close relationships with subcontractors enables LBC to ensure that key skills are introduced to learners and are included at all stages of their programmes.

They manage their subcontractors by:

- ¥ holding regular, minuted meetings
- ¥ asking for weekly reports of learners' progress
- ¥ regularly monitoring practice — for example, observing sessions and asking to see schemes of work
- ¥ regularly communicating with learners through reviews and newsletters
- ¥ developing work-based projects jointly with subcontractors
- ¥ using staged payments: the final 25% of the subcontractor's fee is only paid on completion of the full framework
- ¥ carrying out key skills resources checks to make sure that subcontractors are making the best use of resources — for example, carrying out publications searches on the internet.



# Designing activities

*We had to make a paper tower — the first group to get their tower to the ceiling won. The point of the exercise was teamwork and to get to know people. I was in a group of shy people. They were coming out of themselves and swapping names and telephone numbers. At the end of it everyone was talking to each other politely and being considerate — acting like responsible adults at the end of the day.*

**Stephen, apprentice**

Letting learners experience how key skills are relevant to their work and to their lives is much more interesting than just talking about them. In this section you will find ideas for activities for introducing key skills to learners and instances of when and how to use them.

## Using multi-faceted activities

Using activities for more than one purpose — linking them to both vocational tasks and the key skills — will help to embed key skills and Skills for Life into the vocational area. Providers who use activities in this way find that learners are more likely to see the relevance of these skills, so it makes sense to use them with learners from the outset. Learners may also gain more confidence by using the same activity in a variety of ways as this encourages the development of learning to learn skills which are invaluable for fostering lifelong learning.

*I've built up a range of assignments on my laptop. They're fairly easy to adapt to the vocational context — or I write a new one with the learner.*

**Tutor**

## Using the workplace

If induction takes place mainly on the job, you need activities that make the most of the workplace and that ask learners to get other people involved.

## Off-job induction

Group inductions that take place over a week or several days lend themselves to activities and group projects that may take longer to complete.

On the next page is an example group activity that you could adapt.

*Induction's the only time our learners are all together, so we get them practising presentations and doing plenty of teamwork-type activities.*

**Key skills tutor**



## Example activity

### Where to get the best deal on a mobile phone

#### 1 You need to prepare

- ¥ A selection of mobile phone brochures with prices
- ¥ Example phone bills and/or tariffs from each network (summarise these on a worksheet if appropriate)
- ¥ Flipchart
- ¥ Pens

#### 2 Discuss the activity with the whole group

Ask the following questions:

- ¥ What sorts of things have you bought recently?
- ¥ How do you feel about buying goods?
- ¥ What makes you decide whether or not you will buy?

Discuss and record learners' answers on the flipchart, for example:

- ¥ the range of goods they buy
- ¥ the feelings that different people have when they spend money
- ¥ the different criteria they use when selecting and buying goods.

#### 3 Introduce the activity brief

Ask learners to work in small groups of three or four.

**Brief: You're looking for a new mobile phone – what's the best deal you can find? Come back and explain your choice to the whole group.**

Discuss with learners how they plan to tackle the task. For example, they will need to decide:

- ¥ who will do what
- ¥ what criteria they will use to make their decision (cheapness of calls, 'cool' factor of the handset, etc.).

#### 4 Ask learners to present their findings to the rest of the group

Keep track of key points for each group so that you can refer to them during the discussion at the end.



## 5 Debrief the activity

Discuss the pros and cons of each small group's approach and findings with the whole group.

Make links to the relevant key skills as you do this by showing learners how they have been applying them. Here are some examples.

Key skill	Example
<b>Communication</b>	Reading, writing, discussing and presenting information
<b>Application of number</b>	Interpreting numerical information Carrying out calculations (e.g. when comparing prices or network tariffs) Presenting numerical information in different ways
<b>ICT</b>	Using computers to access the internet for information and to present their recommendations
<b>Working with others</b>	Understanding the activity brief and planning how to work together Working with others towards achieving the given objectives
<b>Problem solving</b>	Understanding the activity brief and identifying ways to tackle it Following their plan for solving the problem Checking if the problem has been solved and identifying how to improve problem solving during the activity debrief







## Other sample activities

*For communication, it's about being able to express ideas or feelings on the one hand, or comment on whether or not something's fact or fiction. For number, it's about finding activities that show number in context and help learners to apply them. You're trying to create a learning environment where it's safe for them to express themselves and to work with numbers.*

**Key skills tutor**

Here are some short activities linked to the key skills. You can adapt most of them to use with individual learners.

### Modelling a task

You may be able to design activities that model real tasks that learners might carry out later in their programme. This can help to prepare them for the job while familiarising them with key skills and Skills for Life. Here is one example:

*Our Early Years learners plan and cost an outing for a group of children. They look at all aspects: the law, designing forms, choosing a venue, involving parents, planning menus and booking transport. We use this to introduce them to all parts of the programme — the NVQ, key skills and the technical certificate.*

**Key skills tutor**

### Fact finding

Other options include short research activities and projects which can encourage teamwork. Here is an example from another provider:

*We do mini fact-finding projects in the workplace for things like health and safety. It's fairly straightforward making links to the legislation and to the key skills once they've done a bit of research.*

**Key skills coordinator**

### Name that tool

For this, you need pictures of tools and equipment used within the occupational area and you ask learners to name them and say (or guess) what they are used for. This is a good activity to use at induction as learners may not be familiar with the tools of their trade.

*The key skills tutor and I do a joint session at induction using this activity. I introduce them to care and maintenance of hand tools and she introduces them to communication.*

**Vocational tutor, wood occupations**



## What would you do if ?

Think of common situations learners are likely to face in their occupational area, write them on pieces of card and ask learners to discuss their responses. For example: What would you do if a customer swore at you? Involve the employer in your discussions about what's appropriate if you're in the workplace.

*I use this on induction to encourage group discussion. We link it to the communication key skill and to their contributions at team meetings. I reintroduce the activity later on when they've been in the workplace for some time. It's amazing how different their responses are.*

**Key skills tutor**

## Estimating

Ask learners to guess the height/weight/length/volume of an item. Give a prize to the one who's closest.

*I use this one a lot as I find learners aren't good at estimating. I use it first thing in the morning and the winner gets a bacon butty, or just before the session ends and I let the winner off early.*

**Key skills tutor**

*We do estimating with a big box of biscuits. They guess the number of biscuits, the weight and the price. Of course, we eat them afterwards!*

**Key skills tutor**

## Fancy a cuppa?

Ask learners to work in four pairs or teams. The first team is asked to write the instructions for making a cup of tea/coffee. The second team is asked to take the orders for tea/coffee on an order form they have designed themselves. The third team has to make the tea/coffee following the instructions provided by the first team and the order provided by the second team. The fourth team is asked to design an assessment sheet to provide feedback to the other teams on the effectiveness of their work. This activity can be used in any setting and combines verbal and written communication skills, teamworking, sequencing, understanding assessment and potentially ICT.

## Looking further afield

You don't have to restrict yourself to the training centre or workplace. For example, as part of the induction process, all new learners at Luton Borough Council take part in a 4-day residential outward bound course where activities are based around the plan, do, review concept and help develop team-building skills in particular. Learners plan and give a presentation at the end of the course. LBC stresses that, because learners develop a good understanding of key skills at the beginning of their programme, they are better able to identify key skills learning and evidence opportunities during the course of their work.



# Where next?

Use the chart below to reflect on what you do now and anything you need to change as a result of your work on this guide.

Topic	What we do now	What we need to change
Getting the message right		
Planning your delivery model		
Working together as a team		
Joining up learning		
Engaging learners		
Making early success visible		
Involving employers		
Introducing the tests		
Maintaining quality		
Designing activities		

## Help from the Key Skills Support Programme

The Key Skills Support Programme provides a wide range of key skills support and guidance including training, materials, consultancy and newsletters. Visit the KSSP website at [www.keyskillssupport.net](http://www.keyskillssupport.net).

Other KSSP publications include:

- *Preparing for the level 1 and 2 tests*. This guide explains what the tests involve, looks at ways of preparing learners and discusses the arrangements your centre will need to make.
- *Improving initial assessment*. This guide examines the range of techniques and approaches to initial assessment, and suggests ways of auditing your current practice and planning an initial assessment system.
- *Managing key skills and Skills for Life in work-based learning*. This handbook explores all the main aspects of key skills and Skills for Life that need managing if your organisation is to deliver them effectively and meet its obligations to learners.
- *Simple guide to key skills* introduces the six key skills to learners.
- *Key skills and Apprenticeships – the employer’s role* is aimed at employers and provides information about the key skills and how employers can support learners.

You can download copies of all these publications from [www.ksspforwork.org.uk/guides.php](http://www.ksspforwork.org.uk/guides.php) and some can also be ordered from the address on the back cover of this guide.

The Key Skills Support Programme provides a number of resources to support delivery to learners. These include worksheets and assignments which are tailored to different vocational sectors and which can be adapted for other groups of learners.

See [www.ksspforwork.org.uk/resources.php](http://www.ksspforwork.org.uk/resources.php).

You can download the Key-line module on *Key skills induction* from the Key-line website. Go to [www.key-line.org.uk](http://www.key-line.org.uk) for more information.

The KSSP has also produced online resources for learners at [www.keyskills4u.com](http://www.keyskills4u.com).

### **To contact the Key Skills Support Programme**

Telephone the KSSP Helpline: 0845 602 3386

Email: [helpline@lfw.org.uk](mailto:helpline@lfw.org.uk)

Write to: Key Skills Support Programme, Learning for Work,  
The Cottage Office, Eightlands Road, Dewsbury, West Yorkshire WF13 2PF

## Other sources of help

- The **Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA)** website at [www.qca.org.uk](http://www.qca.org.uk) provides the standards, sample tests and other resources.
- The **Skills for Life programme** materials for embedded learning cover over 20 vocational and community contexts and are mapped to the core curricula for literacy and numeracy. See [www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/embeddedlearning](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/embeddedlearning). There are also literacy and numeracy materials covering Entry level and levels 1 and 2 at [www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/Document\\_Bank](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/Document_Bank).
- **BBC Skillswise** at [www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise](http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise) provides a range of resources for improving English and maths, including games, activities and ideas for sessions.
- **Move On** provides resources for supporting literacy and numeracy, especially with adult learners. Website: [www.move-on.org.uk](http://www.move-on.org.uk)
- **Adult Dyslexia Organisation**  
336 Brixton Road, London SW9 7AA  
Helpline: 020 7207 7796  
Website: [www.futurenet.co.uk/charity/ado/index.html](http://www.futurenet.co.uk/charity/ado/index.html)
- **The British Dyslexia Association**  
98 London Road, Reading, Berkshire RG1 5AU  
Helpline: 0118 966 8271  
Website: [www.bda-dyslexia.org.uk](http://www.bda-dyslexia.org.uk)

For information about providing learning opportunities for disabled learners, you may find the following useful:

- **Disability Rights Commission**  
Freepost MID 02164, Stratford-upon-Avon CV37 9BR  
Telephone: 0845 762 2633  
Text phone: 0845 762 2644 Fax: 0845 777 8878  
Website: [www.drc.org.uk](http://www.drc.org.uk)
- **MIND** is the leading mental health charity in England and Wales.  
Telephone: 0845 766 0163  
Website: [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)
- **Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID)**  
19–23 Featherstone Street, London EC1Y 8SL  
Telephone: 020 7296 8000  
Text phone: 020 7296 8001 Fax: 020 7296 8199  
Website: [www.rnid.org.uk](http://www.rnid.org.uk)
- **Royal National Institute for Blind People (RNIB)**  
105 Judd Street, London WC1H 9NE  
Telephone: 020 7388 1266 Fax: 020 7388 2034  
Website: [www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)













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