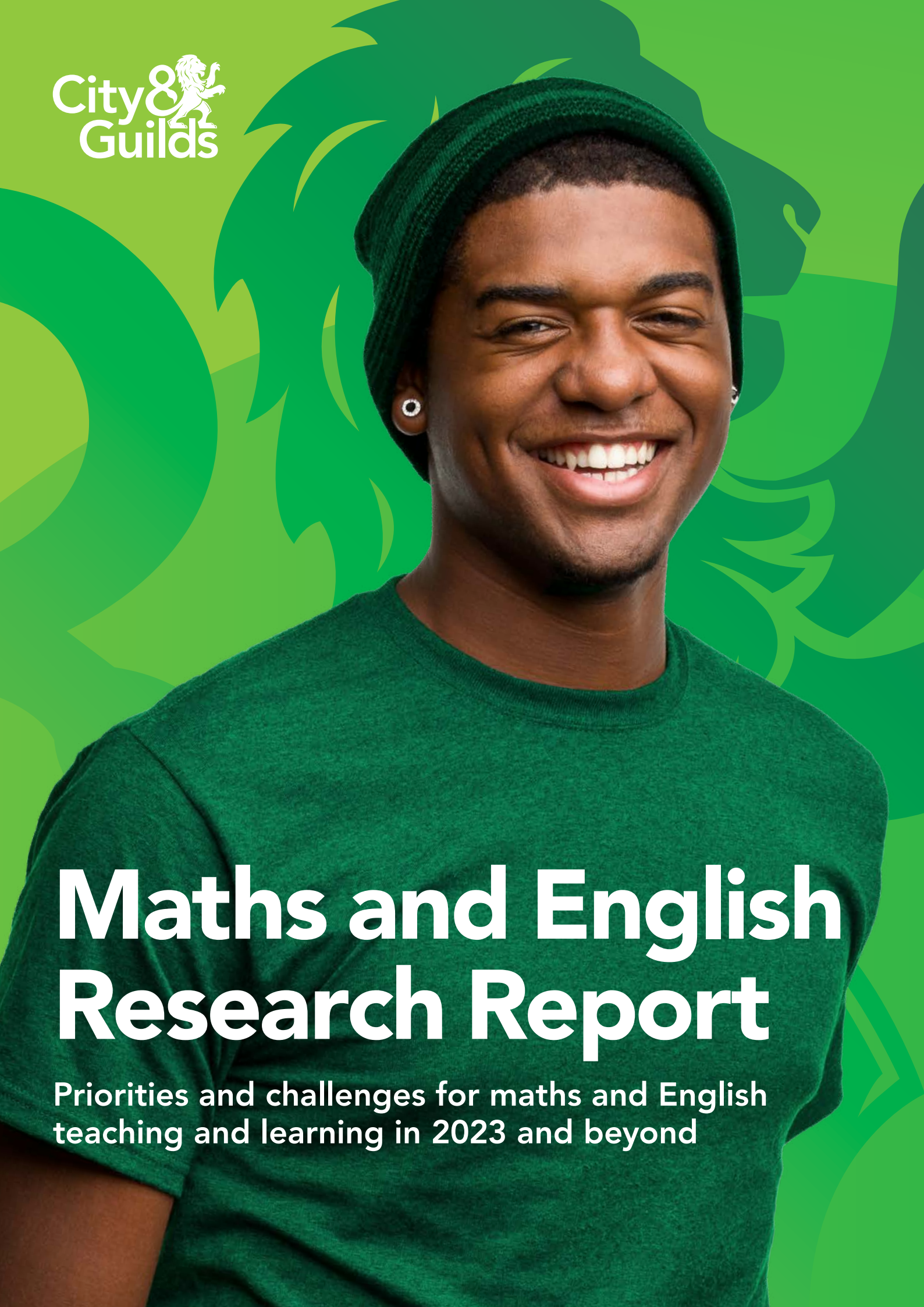
City & Guilds



Maths and English Research Report

Priorities and challenges for maths and English teaching and learning in 2023 and beyond

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Introduction

At City & Guilds, we have supported both learners and those involved in teaching and assessing skills in maths and English for over 40 years.

Maths and English is a key priority in the City & Guilds' agenda, as part of our mission to "inspire and support people to progress into the job, on the job and onto the next job by developing their skills at every step of their career journey". We know that literacy and numeracy skills are critical to the development of learners, whether they be apprentices, 16-18 year olds or adults, and they are central in helping organisations and economies to thrive.

This makes it important for us to understand the objectives, challenges and views of our customers and wider stakeholders involved in delivering English and maths programmes. It enables us to shape our strategy, products and services to ensure that they effectively meet the needs of providers and learners within the education sector, now and into the future. It also informs how we communicate with our customers, highlighting where and how our existing offer can provide solutions that support current priorities.

In March 2023, we conducted a research project targeting individuals involved with maths and English teaching and learning in the UK. There were 381 respondents in total, all involved in the delivery of maths and English programmes across a range of roles and in a variety of settings.

We wanted to share the findings of this research in a report, to reflect your views back to you and to let you know how City & Guilds continues to support you and your objectives.

381
Respondents

Respondents' job roles

53%
tutors, teachers, or assessors

30%
management or head of centre roles

17%
exams, quality or other roles

Respondents' delivery settings

67%
work with apprentices

54%
work with adult learners

40%
work with 16-18 learners

Maths and English – a Snapshot

Quality

The most common priority for those involved in maths and English delivery is improving the quality of their provision (64%)

Learner engagement

The factor that most respondents believe would help them achieve their priorities is increased learner interest and engagement (64%)

Employer understanding

People involved in the delivery of maths and English want employers to understand that maths and English skills are fundamental to all job roles and ages (68%)

And that numeracy and literacy skill development has tangible benefits for employers (68%)

Government initiatives

Respondents want the government to ensure that maths and English programmes are suited to future workforce needs (24%)

42% support the government's proposed plans to continue compulsory maths provision to the age of 18 in England

Key Priorities

Every provider is different but there are three areas which the majority of respondents we surveyed identified as priorities for the future:

- Improving the quality of maths and English programmes (64%)
- Helping people improve their life chances (62%)
- Raising literacy and numeracy levels regionally and/or nationally (56%)

We recognise the pressures that many providers face can affect quality and successful outcomes in maths and English, including limited resources, learner recruitment and motivation, and staff capacity.

At City & Guilds we aim to provide a catalogue of services and resources that help providers to maximise the quality of their programmes. For example, we have a range of online tools, such as Open Assess, as well as our Technical Advisors and Digital Support Managers who can help you get the most out of them. Our qualification pages contain documents to support quality improvement, including the Chief Examiner's Report and Guidance for Delivery, and we regularly hold webinars to review and discuss these documents in detail. We also work hard on our processes, ensuring that we are able to get results back to our customers quickly, so they can take remedial action where necessary.

In addition, the City & Guilds Foundation aims to innovate, celebrate and evaluate opportunities that make a real difference in people's lives, supporting everyone to succeed, no matter who they are or where they come from. For more information about the bursaries we offer, our work with underprivileged groups and the Princess Royal Training Awards, visit our Foundation website.

You can also find further tips and guidance on improving the quality of maths and English programmes in our Improving Quality guide and further information on improving life chances through literacy and numeracy in our Improving Life Chances guide.

Key priorities are

64%
Improving quality

62%
Improving life changes

56%
Raising literacy and numeracy levels

"Maths and English is a key priority in the City & Guilds agenda, as part of our commitment to helping people, organisations and economies develop their skills for growth. Conducting research and understanding the maths and English capabilities required for the future employment landscape is critical to this purpose, to enable us to shape our products and services, communicate effectively with our customers, and inform senior stakeholders and policy."

Hilary Gwilliam
Senior Category Manager
City & Guilds

Learner Engagement

Learner engagement has clear implications for quality, success rates, helping people improve their life chances and raising regional/national numeracy and literacy levels.

64% of our respondents felt that learner interest and engagement would be the key factor in achieving their maths and English priorities.

Good learner engagement consists of multiple phases, including recruiting motivated learners for programmes and ensuring those learners remain engaged throughout teaching and assessment. We also know that learner engagement can have different challenges and requirements across different delivery settings, and that it is influenced by a complex range of factors from age and personal motivations to experiences at school.

We recognise that our customers put significant effort into generating, maintaining and amplifying learner engagement within their maths and English programmes, and we are seeing evidence that this is having an impact. For example, pass rates at Level 1 and 2 Functional Skills Reading and Writing remain positive for 2023 and are steadily improving in maths.

To facilitate learner engagement, our learning resources are designed to support the development of flexible and engaging delivery of maths and English.

Our e-Functional Skills platform reinforces individual and classroom-based learning, whilst SmartScreen provides a range of videos, classroom activities and interactive e-learning tools to keep learners engaged.

Our analytics platform also helps you understand how learners are performing in exams, so you can target specific challenges and deliver any additional learning in a context most engaging to your learners.

Our regular in-person and virtual networking events are also a great place for those involved in the delivery of maths and English to share ideas and best practice about learner engagement.

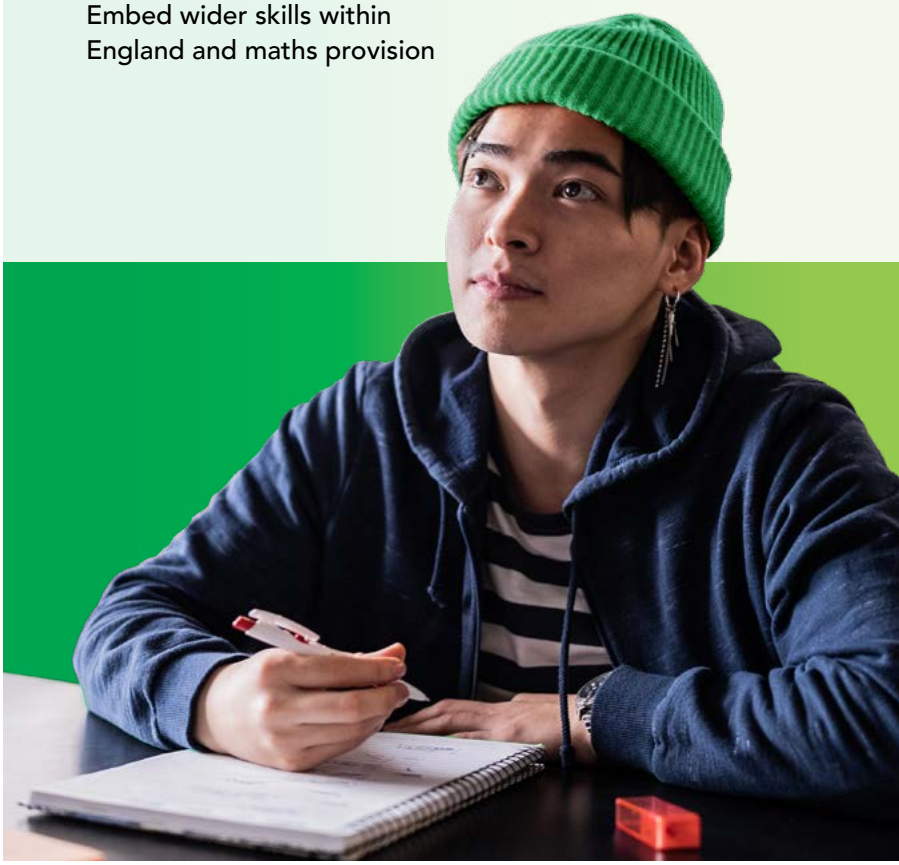
You can get more tips and guidance on learner engagement in maths and English programmes in our Increasing Learner Engagement guide.

Key activities to achieve priorities are

64%
Increase learner engagement

42%
Increase employer engagement

37%
Embed wider skills within England and maths provision



Pass rates at Level 1 and 2 Functional Skills Reading and Writing remain positive for 2023 and are steadily improving in maths.

Maths and English in Context

Learner motivation and successful outcomes are inextricably linked to the importance that learners place on maths and English skills in terms of their current and future employment.

The respondents we surveyed would like employers to have a better understanding of how maths and English are important for all job roles and employees of all ages (68%), and that maths and English training has both tangible benefits (68%), such as productivity, and wider benefits (66%), such as employee wellbeing and confidence.

In addition, more than 40% of our respondents said that employer engagement would make a difference in getting learners more engaged.

Research on employer understanding and appreciation of maths and English skill development is mixed. For example, in a government study in England, approximately three in ten (28%) employers reported having a very or quite good understanding of Functional Skills qualifications.

But we also recognise that there are a diverse range of skills that are needed to enter and move through the world of work.

Maths and English can be seen as components of this wider set of skills that helps to keep learners engaged, whilst preparing them for success in their chosen career pathway.

68%

of respondents in our survey felt that employability skills are an important part of this wider skillset, with personal finance and digital skills also ranking highly.

There is an opportunity to drive an approach where maths and English are part of something bigger, a collection of life skills which complement and enhance each other, with skill development embedded in real-world contexts.

Our programmes have been designed with the flexibility to allow contextualised learning in meaningful ways and our range of networking events also provide a great opportunity to share ideas and best practices around embedding other skills within maths and English delivery.

Additionally, we offer a range of programmes beyond Functional Skills and Essential Skills. These include bite-sized maths and English qualifications, and our suite of employability, personal and social development and digital/IT programmes, which can be used to develop a wider skillset with learners and provide a wider set of contexts for learning.

Employers need to understand that

68%

Literacy and numeracy skills are fundamental to all job roles and ages

68%

Upskilling staff in English and maths has tangible benefits

66%

Upskilling staff in English and maths has wider benefits

"We're proud to support hundreds of maths and English providers and thousands of learners every year to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. Whether you're an existing customer or new to City & Guilds, don't hesitate to get in touch and find out more about how we can help you on your journey."

Amanda Kelly
Industry Manager – Skills for Work and Life
City & Guilds

Government Initiatives

There was split opinion from our survey regarding the support and understanding respondents would like from the government, but the top three things were a system/programmes more suited to the future workforce (24%), more funding (22%) and more stability in the skills and education system (16%)*.

Greater commitment to maths and English from the government is important to our respondents but new proposals to continue mandatory maths education for everyone up to the age of 18 in England has mixed support, with 42% of respondents saying they support the proposed initiative, and a further 22% unsure.

Respondents highlight several challenges with regards to the proposal, including disengaged learners and the impact of "maths anxiety" (76%), too much focus put on passing tests and exams (66%), and the lack of maths teachers available (59%).

Independent charity National Numeracy have spoken about the potential challenges that a maths programme like this might face, referencing their own research which has indicated that 18–24-year-olds have more anxiety around maths and using numbers than any other age group.

There is mixed support for the proposal to continue mandatory maths education up to the age of 18 in England.

*For this particular question, respondents were only able to pick one option.

City & Guilds is firmly committed to delivering maths learning and assessment to learners of all ages, and on a wide range of programmes, and is keen to provide flexible and reliable options that put choice in the hands of learners and providers, and which are well understood and valued in the workplace, as well as by the learners themselves. We recognise that brand is important to learners and employers, but the right content that builds confident, capable and numerate future employees is key.

Understanding the position and perceived challenges of people that are involved in delivering maths and English on a day-to-day basis is important to City & Guilds and we work closely with employers and industry to understand their needs. We design our maths and English programmes to be accessible to as many as possible, and to enhance people's employability now and in the future. This information and feedback about government approaches and initiatives enables us to have a fully informed position and to represent our customers' voice in the wider debate.

According to our survey, the government should enable

24%
A system/programmes more suited to the future workforce

22%
More funding

16%
More stability in the skills and education system

Challenges for the government's proposal in England include

76%
Learner disengagement

66%
Too much focus on passing tests and exams

59%
Lack of maths teachers

"The engagement and support from City & Guilds has really contributed to our project's success. The Industry Manager, External Verifier and other staff at City & Guilds have always been on hand to help. It really has been a journey together."

Asma Ahmad
Director for Young People's Essential Skills
South Bank Colleges

Supporting our Customers

Thank you to everyone who took the time to complete our survey. Your opinions matter to us. They enable us to improve our products and services to best reflect provider needs, and to understand the wider landscape of maths and English teaching and learning.

City & Guilds

At City & Guilds, we have supported both learners and those involved in teaching and assessing skills in maths, English & ICT for over 40 years. Our wide range of qualifications and teaching and learning resources are designed to support our customers to improve the quality of teaching and learning, increase learner engagement and improve learners' life chances.

As well as a flexible offer and quality assessment processes, we offer a range of support services to our customers. Our solutions are designed to help colleges, employers and other providers increase the effectiveness of their delivery and keep up to date with changes in the sector with end-to-end support.

Our digital support tools include Walled Garden, cityandguilds.com, e-Functional Skills, e-volve and SmartScreen, whilst our specialist maths and English Technical Advisors provide:

- Regular update webinars to share all that's new in maths and English
- Webinars to launch new features, products and services
- In-person and online networking events for connecting and sharing of good practice
- Email/online and in-person guidance to individual centres – tailored to their specific needs

If you'd like to find out more about how City & Guilds can support your maths and English provision, get in touch. We're here to help.

About City & Guilds

City & Guilds is the global skills partner, empowering people, organisations and economies to develop the skills they need for growth. With almost 150 years of trusted expertise, we support people into work, help them develop on the job and move into the next job.

We work with Governments, employers, training providers, colleges and industry stakeholders to design and deliver high-quality training, qualifications, assessments and credentials that lead to meaningful career progression. We understand the life changing link between skills development, social mobility and success. Our solutions span critical sectors including construction, engineering, transport, energy and electrical, serving over 1 million learners annually.

Through our comprehensive portfolio of brands and trusted global network, we set industry-wide standards for technical, behavioural and commercial skills to improve performance and productivity. We believe you can achieve your potential - and we're here to help make it happen.

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