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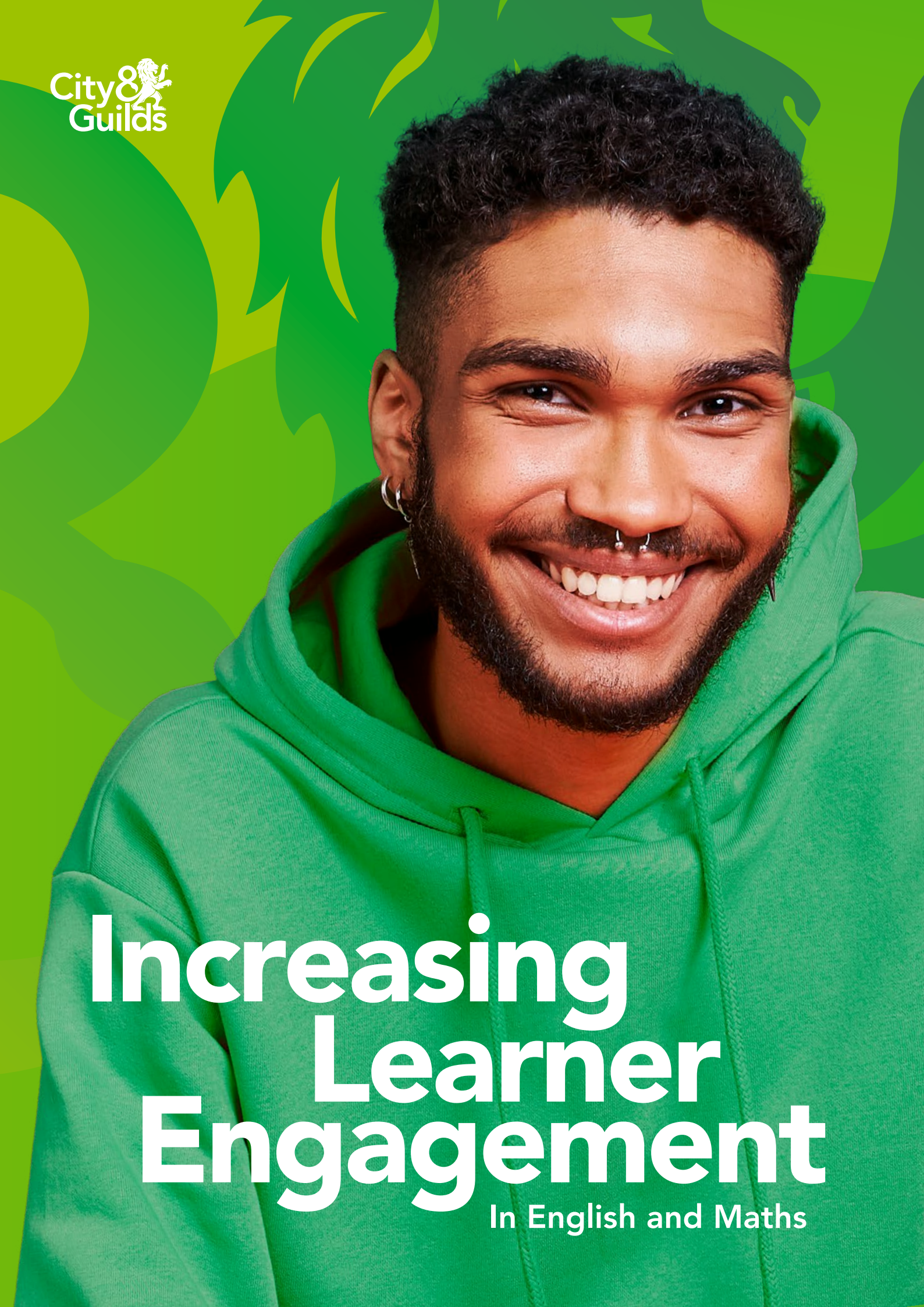


Increasing Learner Engagement

In English and Maths

In our recent survey of 381 English and maths professionals in the UK, increasing learner interest and engagement in maths and English programmes was selected as a top priority by 64% of respondents. There are challenges to engaging learners in maths and English that are unique to these subjects and which have implications across multiple programmes and funding streams. In this article, we will provide some guidance on increasing learner engagement in the post-16 landscape (excluding apprenticeships), in terms of getting learners onto programmes and engaging them throughout their course.

Providing the right environment

Further education colleges and adult course providers have the opportunity to develop an environment that empowers learners and places emphasis on the value of maths and English skills. Creating an environment that is conducive to a positive learning experience is particularly important with many learners having perceived negative experiences with these subjects whilst at school.

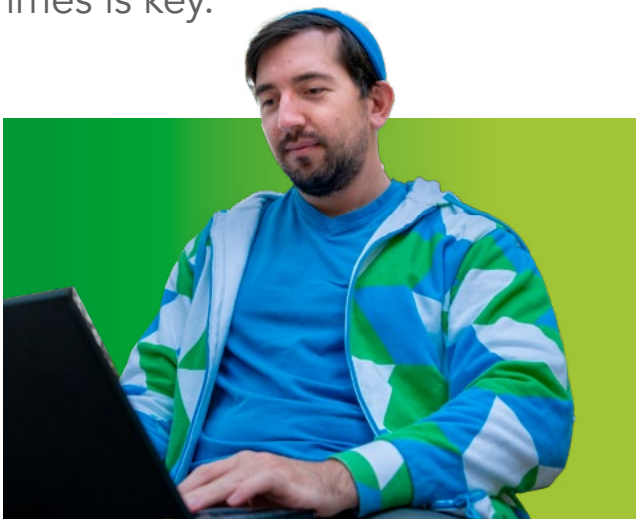
- Develop a whole college/centre approach where responsibility for maths and English is owned by all departments and staff
- Provide development sessions and support materials for teachers and tutors in other subject areas to enable them to reinforce the relevance of maths and English within their programmes
- Enable cross-working between the English and maths team and other areas to foster connections, share best practice and identify of opportunities for English and maths to be embedded in other subject content
- Invest in the development of maths and English teams, with key strategies and incentives for the recruitment, retainment and reskilling of staff
- Foster positive, collaborative relationships between staff and learners, and between learner peers, from the outset of programmes

64%

of maths and English professionals say increasing learner engagement is a key priority

Recruiting and engaging

Recruiting and engaging with the right potential learners to get them onto the right programmes is key.



For 19+ programmes:

- Participate in community outreach activity to build partnerships and referral sources
- Encourage word-of-mouth communications through referral incentives
- Use a range of marketing channels – social media, website and search rankings, email and text messaging, and a variety of content, such as case studies, information flyers, blogs and video
- Target marketing to the specific audiences you want to attract in terms of channels and content e.g. if you are targeting learners from ethnic minority backgrounds use appropriate imagery and case studies and advertise on websites and in places these individuals would typically visit.

For FE college/16-18 programmes:

- Give maths and English teams presence and publicity at open events and during other recruitment activities to elevate their importance in learners' minds and prevent them being perceived as "add-ons"
- Ensure that maths and English is given sufficient prominence in the enrolment process, alongside learners' main vocational programme
- Produce case studies that new learners can identify with i.e. case studies of learners from a variety of starting points and undertaking a range of vocational courses

For all programmes:

- Use quality diagnostic assessments, supplemented with one-to-one personal interviews to identify learner needs and goals and to build a relationship between the learner and centre
- Provide a positive recruitment and enrolment experience that encourages learners to disclose barriers, challenges and additional support needs as early as possible
- Implement a "tell us once" policy so that key information about learners is shared between recruiters and teaching staff
- Maintain regular communication between the maths and English team and learners throughout the recruitment and enrolment process to keep them engaged
- Consider if there are any practical barriers that are common to learners and how these can be overcome, such as childcare and transport issues

"Our research identified that increasing learner engagement is critical for centres and colleges providing English and maths programmes. Creating a positive educational environment, recruiting the right learners, contextualising learning, and motivating learners are all key activities that will support the achievement of this objective."

Amanda Kelly
Industry Manager – Maths, English, ESOL, Employability
City & Guilds

Making it relevant

Adapting programmes to suit the different needs and interests of learners is key to keeping learners engaged throughout their course and maximising achievement rates.

- Develop and maintain a diverse offer that meets a range of learner needs, and could include formal qualifications and non-accredited learning through schemes such as Multiply
- Create separate classes for learners at the same level and with similar objectives and interests or form smaller groups within classes
- Align course content with the interests of learners such as other courses they are undertaking or relevant issues (e.g. cost of living crisis)
- Consider opportunities for embedding other critical life skills – digital, employability, personal finance and wellbeing
- Give teaching staff the knowledge and resources to offer alternative teaching methods to learners
- Use a variety of approaches including collaborative and individual work, paper and computer-based, passive and interactive learning, discussions and self-study
- Incorporate peer-to-peer learning so that more advanced learners can embed their knowledge, whilst supporting less able learners
- Provide opportunities for learners to self-rate and identify their own areas for further improvement
- Provide quality information, advice and guidance to reinforce how their current course will support progression to other programmes at your centre, but also to wider training and employment opportunities

Supporting and motivating

Making course content relevant to individuals or groups of learners will go a long way to motivating learners and keeping them engaged, but there are a range of other mechanisms you can put in place to motivate and support.

- Use experienced, personable and qualified teachers and tutors, who have opportunities for continuous professional development, networking and sharing of best practice
- Encourage learners to take ownership of their learning by creating a supportive environment where they feel comfortable and confident to self-identify areas for improvement
- Offer a range of additional support options, such as workshops, self-study and opportunities to ask questions after class

- Consider other barriers to learning which could be impacting students, such as difficulties with understanding the wording of maths questions for ESOL students
- Recognise and discuss learners' previous experiences with English and maths, acknowledge anxiety and create a positive learning culture
- Provide high quality feedback and celebrate small wins
- Implement support where personal circumstances affect participation
- Timetable classes appropriately as much as possible, to suit the circumstances of learners and maximise attendance e.g. plan maths and English sessions in between learners' vocational classes in FE colleges
- Consider lesson duration – shorter lessons can allow for better concentration and opportunities to regularly build on knowledge
- Implement reward systems to encourage attendance, and supportive interventions where personal circumstances are affecting participation
- Gain employer engagement, emphasising to learners the importance of maths and English in the world of work
- Provide pastoral care and additional revision sessions in the lead up to exams
- Create a supportive exam environment, such as offering refreshments and having the teacher/tutor present for learners beforehand

"The engagement and support from City & Guilds has really contributed to our success. The Industry Manager, External Verifier and other staff at City & Guilds are always on hand to help."

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

City & Guilds – Supporting you to improve quality

At City & Guilds, we have supported both learners and those involved in teaching and assessing skills in maths, English & digital for over 40 years. Our wide range of qualifications and teaching and learning support resources are all designed to help enhance learner engagement and improve the quality of teaching and learning.

As well as a flexible offer and quality assessment processes, we offer a range of support services to our customers. We have a range of solutions designed to help colleges, employers and all other providers to 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

References

In producing this guidance, insights were taken from The DfE commissioned CFE Research (CFE) in partnership with the University of Nottingham, Birmingham City University and Edge Hill University, as well as the recent Learning and Work Institute paper on maths and English for adult learners.

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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