City & Guilds

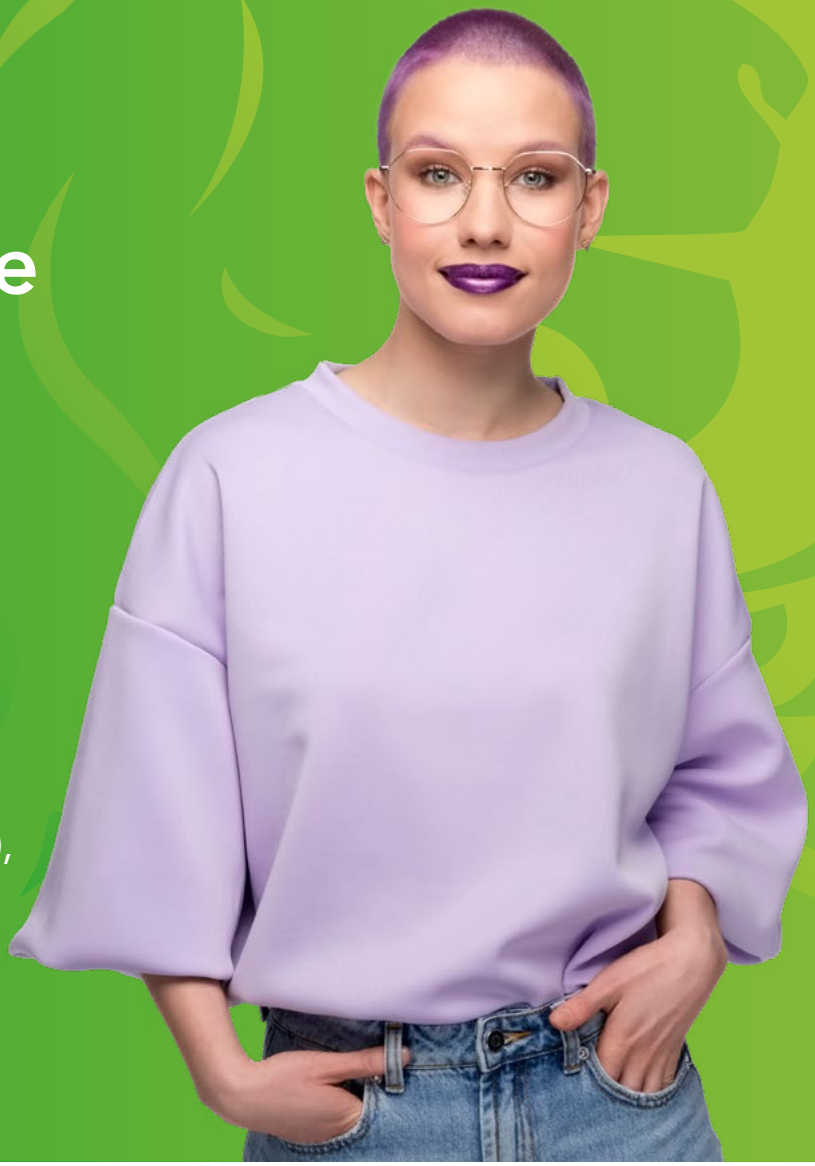
Improving life chances

with English and Maths

In our recent survey of 381 English and maths professionals in the UK, improving the life chances of learners was selected as a top priority by 62% of respondents. With participation in maths and English skills programmes known to have significant tangible benefits for learners, this article provides some guidance on how providers can maximise the impact they have on learners and communities in the post-16 landscape (excluding apprenticeships).

The importance of English and maths

In England, 9 million people of working-age are estimated to have low basic skills in literacy or numeracy, with 5 million having low skills in both areas. The latest date for Wales (2010), found that 12% of working-age adults (around 220,000) had literacy skills below level 1 and 50% (around 920,000) had numeracy skills below level 1.



But research has shown that upskilling in numeracy and literacy has many positive outcomes for learners, including improvements in:

- Employment, pay and promotion opportunities
- Mental health, including life satisfaction, mental well-being and self-esteem
- Physical health and lifespan

In order to make an impact on literacy and numeracy levels, and to therefore improve people's employment and health prospects, providers need to engage more learners, maximise successful outcomes, enable progression and assist in the development of real-life skills.

62%

of maths and English professionals say improving life chances for learners is a top priority

"Our research identified that improving the life chances of learners is a key objective for centres and colleges providing English and maths programmes. Engaging with the right learners, contextualising learning, maximising outcomes, and enabling progression are all key activities that will support the achievement of this objective."

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

Engaging learners

Recruiting and engaging with hard-to-reach potential learners and getting them onto the right programmes is key to making an impact.

For 19+ programmes:

- Identify community groups which work with hard-to-reach potential learners and participate in 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, flyer distribution, email and text messaging
- Use marketing content, such information flyers, blogs and video that specifically targets your hard-to-reach learners with imagery and language
- Develop case studies that showcase the achievements and outcomes of learners from different backgrounds

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 with 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

Developing real life skills

Tailoring maths and English course content to important life skills and issues will enhance your offer and increase its relevant for learners.

- Develop and maintain a diverse offer that meets a range of learner needs, and could include formal qualifications and non-accredited learning
- 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 real-life issues (e.g. cost of living crisis, health issues such as counting calories or steps)
- Consider opportunities for embedding other critical life skills – digital, employability, personal finance and wellbeing
- Give adult learners the opportunity to discuss their children's maths and English homework, and provide support to these parents
- 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

Maximising outcomes

In order to maximise learner success, it is important to keep learners supported and motivated throughout their course.

- 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
- Enlist the help of your marketing team to come into classes for case studies or host an awards event
- Implement support where personal circumstances affect participation
- Timetable classes appropriately as much as possible, to suit the circumstances of learners and maximise attendance
- 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
- 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

Enabling progression

Giving learners opportunities to progress onto other courses or into employment will help them to improve their life chances.

- Provide quality information, advice and guidance at the start and end of the programme to reinforce how their current course will support progression to other programmes at your centre, but also to wider training and employment opportunities
- Invite guest speakers such as wellbeing experts and personal finance advisors – to give advice, linking how improved literacy and numeracy skills will help learners in these areas
- Gain employer engagement, emphasising to learners the importance of maths and English in the world of work
- Host an opportunities fair where you can connect learners with local employers, as well as other providers that offer courses you don't or promote jobs fairs and other local events that are being hosted by community groups
- Track the progression of your learners as much as possible, demonstrating that you are committed to their continued success and giving you further opportunity to generate case studies and celebrate success

"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 and your learners

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 learners' life chances, including employability, and improve the quality of

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 government paper Investigating the Benefits of English and Maths Provision for Adult Learners: Part 1 Quantitative Assessment, the DfE commissioned CFE Research (CFE) in partnership with the University of Nottingham, Birmingham City University and Edge Hill University, and from the Learning and Work Institute website.

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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