



ASSOCIATION
OF COLLEGES

AoC English and maths survey January 2020

Association of Colleges survey report: March 2020



AoC English and maths survey January 2020 – summary report

Introduction

95% of respondents to the AoC 2019/20 academic year English and maths survey make it clear that AoC should be focusing on this key policy issue. Delivering on current English and maths policy continues to be a major challenge, particularly for 16 to 19-year-olds. The ambition to support every young person to improve their English and maths skills is widely shared in the responses, but the policy and delivery issues are complex. Lack of flexibility in the condition of funding, inadequate funding, staff recruitment, volume of students, concerns about whether GCSE is the most suitable qualification and that reformed Functional Skills at Level 2 in particular are too challenging are raised by large numbers of respondents. Poor student engagement and motivation also feature heavily in the majority of responses.

Respondents

45% of all English colleges responded to this survey, slightly higher than last year. For General Further Education (GFE) colleges this percentage rose to 57% or 96 of the 168 GFE colleges nationally.

Region	Number of responses	Number of colleges in region	Percent within region
Eastern region	10	23	43%
East Midlands	8	15	53%
Greater London	14	34	41%
North East	10	14	71%
North West	17	42	40%
South East	15	39	38%
South West	15	24	63%
West Midlands	10	25	40%
Yorkshire and the Humber	11	28	39%
Total England*	110	244	45%

*Excludes 'Other' type of provider

The challenge

95% of respondents indicated that English and maths should be a priority for AoC. Responses indicate that English and maths skills are viewed as being key,

but the current policy is not effective in achieving the required outcomes. Too many young people are being failed.

Poor student attendance, staff recruitment and timetabling are still seen as key issues. Respondents also identified student engagement and motivation as being a key challenge.

It was felt that additional funding to support staff recruitment, a review of the condition of funding (CoF) policy and the qualifications on offer, research into best practice and better access to student information from schools would all help.

Qualification entry policies

While all colleges comply with the requirement to enter students for GCSE if they have achieved a grade 3 college policies differ on the detail. 43% of respondents enter 16 to 18-year-old students with prior achievement of GCSE grade 3 onto GCSE and others onto Functional Skills. 38% enter all students with prior attainment of GCSE grades 2 and 3 onto GCSE and 15% enter all 16 to 18-year-olds, irrespective of grades onto GCSE. 18% of respondents offer some flexibility in their internal policy for students with grade 1 or 2 on entry. The most popular of these being to offer those with grade 2 on entry the opportunity to sit GCSE if they do well in initial and subsequent assessment. 3 respondents operate a two-year English and maths programme.

55% of respondents felt that GCSE has greater currency with key stakeholders (parents/carers, employers and students) than Functional Skills. 51% felt that progress measures result in better progress for students and the college under GCSE. 51% said that concerns about retention were the key reason they did not run a two-year GCSE programme. In the free response section of this question it was clear that meeting students' individual needs are also a key consideration.

29% of colleges indicated that they had changed their entry policy as a result of the change to the condition of funding for students with grade 2 or below on entry. Reasons for not altering the policy were that numbers were small (7% at one large GFE) and Functional Skills Level 2 are considered too difficult.

Both a relaxation of the condition of funding for grade 3 students and allowing students with grade 2 on entry to achieve the CoF by achieving Level 1 Functional Skills would mean that colleges may rethink their policies.

Support for AoC policy asks

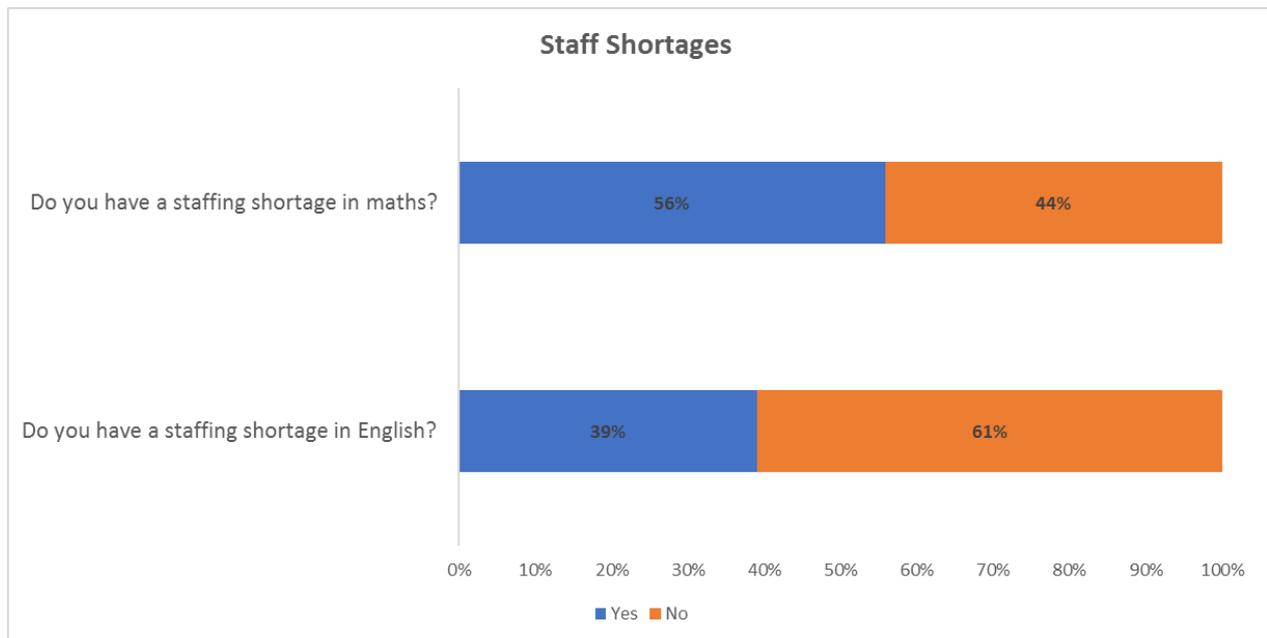
The AoC English and maths policy group is considering a number of policy asks. The response from members indicates strong support for the range of measures:

Policy asks	Agree	Disagree	Total
The flexibility of condition of funding (CoF) confirmed for T levels (GCSE or level 2 Functional Skills) should be extended to all study programme students.	91%	9%	100%
The flexibility of condition of funding (CoF) confirmed for T Levels (GCSE or Level 2 Functional Skills) should be extended to the T Level Transition year.	95%	5%	100%
There should be additional funding for English and maths delivery to enable individualised learning and support staff recruitment and retention.	100%	0%	100%
A wider range of stepping stone qualifications should be funded.	88%	12%	100%
The current 5% tolerance should be extended to 8%.	77%	23%	100%
Schools should be required to forward agreed transition information to colleges.	99%	1%	100%
AoC and colleges should design a realistic set of progress measures for the sector.	95%	5%	100%
There should be post-16 English and maths qualifications.	88%	12%	100%

When asked to rank these policy asks, additional funding was rated most highly with 46% of respondents placing that as their key ask and 31% ranking a post 16 English and maths qualification as their number one priority.

Staffing and cpd

56% of respondents reported that they had a staffing shortage in Maths and 39% had a staffing shortage in English.



In the free text responses, respondents noted that they were in competition with schools who are also struggling to recruit, but often offer better terms and conditions. Covering staff absence is a challenge for many colleges. A number of colleges said that they were ‘growing their own’ teachers by training up existing staff.

73% of respondents indicated that compulsory college placements for PGCE students would be a good idea to attract staff into FE English and maths, a 15% increase in comparison with the 2018/19 survey. Many felt that it would enable PGCE students to see the opportunities in FE. 19% of respondents partially agreed but said that it should not be compulsory.

Exam entry costs

The average college spend on GCSE entries for 16 to 18-year-olds is £70,000 per centre with the maximum being £375,000. For adults it is £12,700. For 16 to 18 Functional Skills the average is £23,700 and for adults £18,251.

Education and Training Foundation English and maths cpd offer

59% of colleges were aware of the Education and Training Foundation’s training modules for English and maths, 49%% had used it, an increase of 12% on 2018/19.

Maths initiatives

Basic maths premium pilot

33% of the respondents have been part of the basic maths premium pilot. In the free test response question on impact there was considerable difference between those who received the money up front and those who will receive money on completion. Those in the first group have used the money for staffing online resources, smaller class sizes, increased teaching hours, targeted intervention and learning support and incentives to encourage attendance and achievement. Those who had received the money on completion found the initiative frustrating as they did not know how much money they would receive and so could not invest.

Centres for Excellence

Of the 21 Centres for Excellence, 14 responded to the survey (13% of respondents). Of those who were not Centres for Excellence 53% had engaged with a centre. Overall feedback was mixed. Some colleges noted the opportunity for collaboration to share good practice and cpd. However, others indicated that they had found it difficult to engage with a centre, had not been approached or the logistical challenges of travel to the nearest centre made it a challenge.

Advanced maths premium

Overall, it was felt that the advanced maths premium had not had an impact on increasing Level 3 maths. 77% of respondents indicated that the introduction of the Advanced maths Premium hasn't encouraged them to expand Level 3 maths provision. 38% indicated that they are encouraging Level 3 vocational students to undertake Level 3 maths as part of their Study Programme, especially for students on engineering and science courses. Challenges with staffing and student motivation meant that many colleges would not be pursuing any further Level 3 maths.

22% of colleges have addressed the gender gap in Level 3 maths and 51% want to do more to encourage greater take up of Level 3 maths by female students. Colleges mentioned the importance of using alumni, targeting specific subject areas such as health and actively encouraging female students to take up maths as part of a wider 'women into STEM' strategy.

Functional Skills

Colleges offer a range of levels of Functional Skills, but only 60% offered Level 2 Functional Skills for 16 to 18-year-olds in comparison with 90% offering Level 1.

The difference is less stark for adults; at around 80% offering Level 2 and 90% offering Level 1.

The introduction of Reformed Functional Skills has seen 43% of colleges change their entry policy with many free text respondents indicating that they had moved away from Functional Skills at Level 2 as it is perceived to be too challenging, especially in maths.

Adult English and maths

85% of respondents deliver free standing English and maths to 19+ students with 3% seeing an increase in the past five years due to increased demand from local communities. 22% have seen a drop in provision mirroring a drop in demand. There don't appear to be any regional patterns to this. Adult allocation to GCSE or Functional Skills is based on initial and diagnostic assessment.

Regional influencers

Deprivation and poor prior attainment were key to the free text responses to this question. Concerns were raised by inner city colleges, rural and coastal colleges in particular. Colleges noted that the needs of ESOL students need to be taken into consideration. One college noted that over 80% of students on entry to their college do not hold English and or maths GCSEs.

Other recommendations and views

There were a variety of other recommendations and views: concerns were expressed about variable grade boundaries in GCSE impacting on resit students, perceptions of Functional Skills and funding for adults. A number of colleges stressed the importance of engaging schools, parents and employers much more on this agenda to raise awareness of the importance of achieving English and maths. Funding and flexibility to ensure students achieve the skills they need were a key demand.

In summary, colleges would welcome the opportunity to individualise the English and maths offer to meet student needs and would like to be able to access more funding to support this key policy and the challenges it presents.