



English and maths proposals survey

January 2017

Background

Members of the Association of Colleges (AoC) have made it clear that delivering on current English and maths policy is 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 shared across the sector, but the policy and delivery issues are complex. The focus on GCSE as the gold standard is not helping and the low profile of functional skills qualifications hinders their wider use.

The condition of funding rules and the impact on success rates of hundreds and sometimes thousands of young people taking re-sits is also problematic, particularly in terms of the effect on Ofsted inspection grades. The sheer logistics of re-sits and the pressures on staff are also cause for concern.

Perhaps most importantly, we know that the current policy often demotivates and places stress on young people rather than supporting them to becoming independent students able to succeed in their chosen field of study.

There are similar challenges, perhaps not quite so pressing, on literacy and numeracy for adults, which are also affected by policy for 16 to 19-year-olds.

In order for AoC to develop a position paper which will help lead and inform the debate, we consulted members in December 2016 to influence our policy making.

Response rate

38% of all colleges responded. 80% of the colleges which responded were general further education colleges. This may reflect the specific challenges in large cohort sizes experienced by this part of the sector.



Regional breakdown

Region	Number of responses	Number of colleges in region	Percent within region
Eastern	5	33	15%
East Midlands	8	20	40%
Greater London	28	47	60%
North East	6	19	32%
North West	15	55	27%
South East	19	58	33%
South West	9	24	38%
West Midlands	11	35	31%
Yorkshire and the Humber	21	33	64%
Total colleges in England	122	324	38%
Other*	8		
Total responses	130		

*Other includes anonymous responses, HEIs, independent specialist college, adult education college, sixth form centre

Response summary

The college response indicates that English and maths are considered to be key skills and important to students' progression and aspirations, but not necessarily in the current format which is restrictive and does not allow for programmes to be tailored to individual student need.

Colleges also indicated that a mixed suite of qualifications GCSE or functional skills, dependent on destination, was the most popular option. 95% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that Functional Skills should be given equal recognition alongside GCSE.



Question	Yes	No	Not sure
This is an area of work AoC in which should be involved	96%	0%	4%
FS reform and apprenticeship standard requirements should be reviewed	85%	8%	8%
Staff should be able to use professional judgement in deciding the appropriate option for students (some concern about standardisation)	82%	9%	8%
A pilot should be introduced, possibly in the Opportunity Areas, to explore the value of teachers working across both secondary schools and FE colleges and at the very least develop a more systematic way of sharing good practice.	78%	5%	17%
Modular or credit based qualification (respondents requested more information)	61%	14%	25%
FE placement for teachers (some concerns re this approach for all trainee teachers)	60%	13%	27%
Any new approach to start at KS3	44%	34%	22%
One qualification at a time (concerns about loss of fluency in the other subject)	34%	32%	34%



Contextualisation

The survey asked a number of questions about contextualisation. The responses are below:

Question	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Functional skills should be recognised alongside GCSEs as a means for students to learn applied English and maths	65%	30%	2%	2%	2%
New qualifications for English and maths should be contextualised and linked to the 15 technical routes, outlined in the Sainsbury Review	26%	30%	15%	24%	5%
The Sainsbury Review routes do not cover enough sectors to allow for appropriate English and maths qualifications	14%	31%	43%	11%	1%
Having contextualised qualifications for each route would be too difficult to assess and implement	12%	35%	15%	34%	4%
New qualifications based on routes would not allow for comparability between sectors	11%	34%	16%	35%	3%
A contextualised qualification would not allow for people to use their qualifications in different sectors they move into in the future	17%	31%	15%	32%	4%
Contextualising qualifications would not be possible for the proposed routes as they can be too broad (for example journalism and upholstery in one route)	15%	43%	17%	22%	3%
Contextualising qualifications would not be applicable for adult students	14%	14%	29%	36%	7%



Staffing and CPD support

Respondents indicated that staffing shortages are a greater concern in maths (60%) than in English (42%).

More respondents had heard of Education Training Foundation (ETF) support than not (60%), but fewer used it (43%), which should be investigated further.

Next steps

In the short term AoC has written to Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP, Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills, to recommend that colleges should be able to use professional judgement, based on a student's intended destination, to make an informed decision on the most appropriate English and maths qualification, GCSE or Functional Skills.

In the longer term, with the design and implementation of the Skills Plan and Technical Routes in mind, AoC is setting up a National Policy Group for English and Maths to help formulate policy going forward. This will lead to the creation of a position paper which will outline recommendations for the future.