



ASSOCIATION
OF COLLEGES

AoC English and maths survey report: January 2019

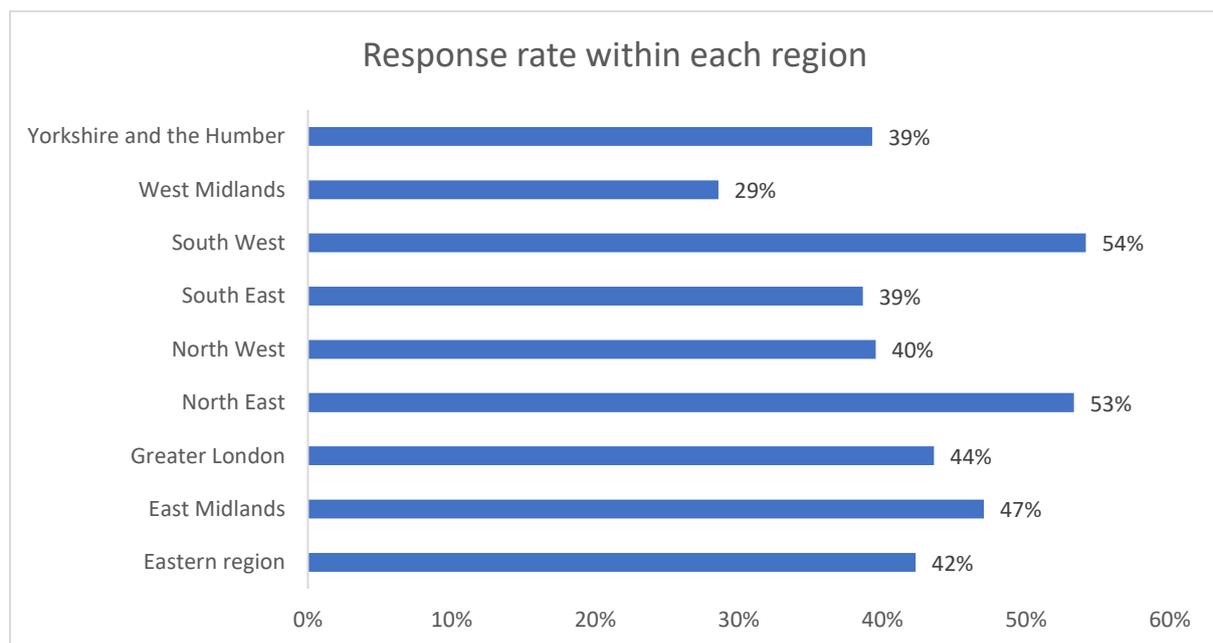
AoC English and maths survey December 2018 – summary report

Introduction

94% of respondents to the AoC 2018 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, staffing, student engagement and motivation feature heavily in the majority of responses.

Respondents

41% of all English colleges responded to this survey. For General Further Education (GFE) colleges this percentage rose to 51% or 99 of the 177 GFE colleges nationally.



The challenge

94% 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 to a lesser extent timetabling are seen as key issues. Respondents also identified student engagement and motivation as being a key challenge.

Qualification entry policies

While all colleges comply with the requirement to enter students for GCSE if they have achieved a grade 3, 43% of respondents enter 16 to 18-year-old students with prior achievement of GCSE grades 2 or 3 and 12% of respondents indicated that they enter all 16 to 18-year old retake students for GCSE. Only 3 respondents operate a two-year English and maths programme.

54% of respondents felt that GCSE has greater currency than Functional Skills. 40% felt that progress measures impacted on their decision making. 39% of respondents felt that Functional Skills are not an effective stepping stone to GCSE. In the free response section of this question it was clear that meeting students' individual needs are also a key consideration.

Colleges indicated that they might change their approach as a result of more flexibility in the condition of funding, new functional skills qualifications with greater currency and the availability of other new qualifications.

Support for AoC policy asks

The AoC English and maths Policy Group has made the following key recommendations:

- Flexibility of the condition of funding (CoF) proposed in the T level consultation response should be brought forward to September 2019
- Appropriate alignment of performance measures:
 - Cap the progress score at a minimum of 0: This would value positive progress and treat prior achievement as 'banked' rather than penalising students who haven't yet made progress.
 - Increase the point score for Functional skills and stepping stone qualifications:
 - Marginally increasing the value of Functional Skills achievement would recognise achievement while maintaining the differential with GCSE grades and between levels. Suggested changes +0.6 at Entry Level, +0.5 at level 1 and +0.5 at level 2.

- Additional funding for English and maths delivery to enable individualised learning and support staff recruitment and retention
- Stepping stone qualifications to be funded
- Review of the current 5% tolerance.

There was strong support for the current AoC policy asks.

99% of respondents agreed that additional funding was a priority ask.

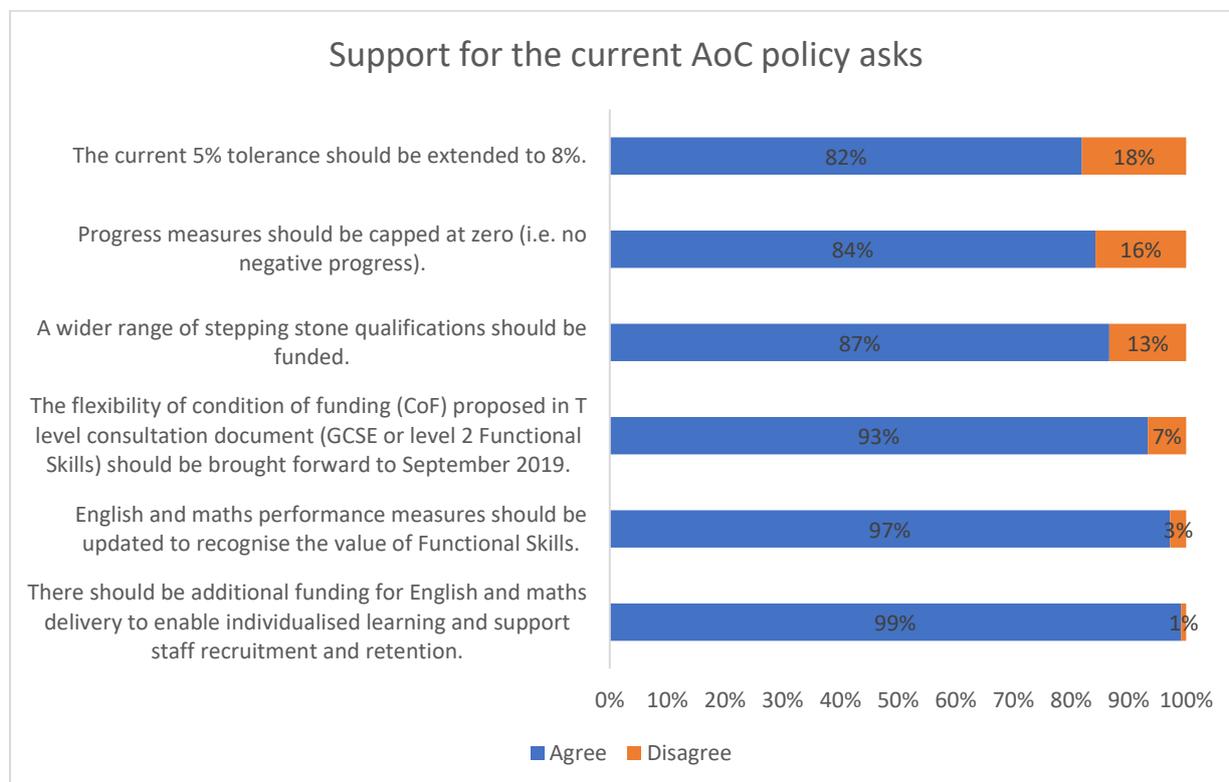
97% wanted the progress measures to be updated to reflect the value of Functional Skills qualifications.

93% wanted the flexibility offered in T Levels (of either GCSE or L2 Functional Skills) in the condition of funding to apply to all students.

87% wanted a wider range of stepping stone qualifications to be funded.

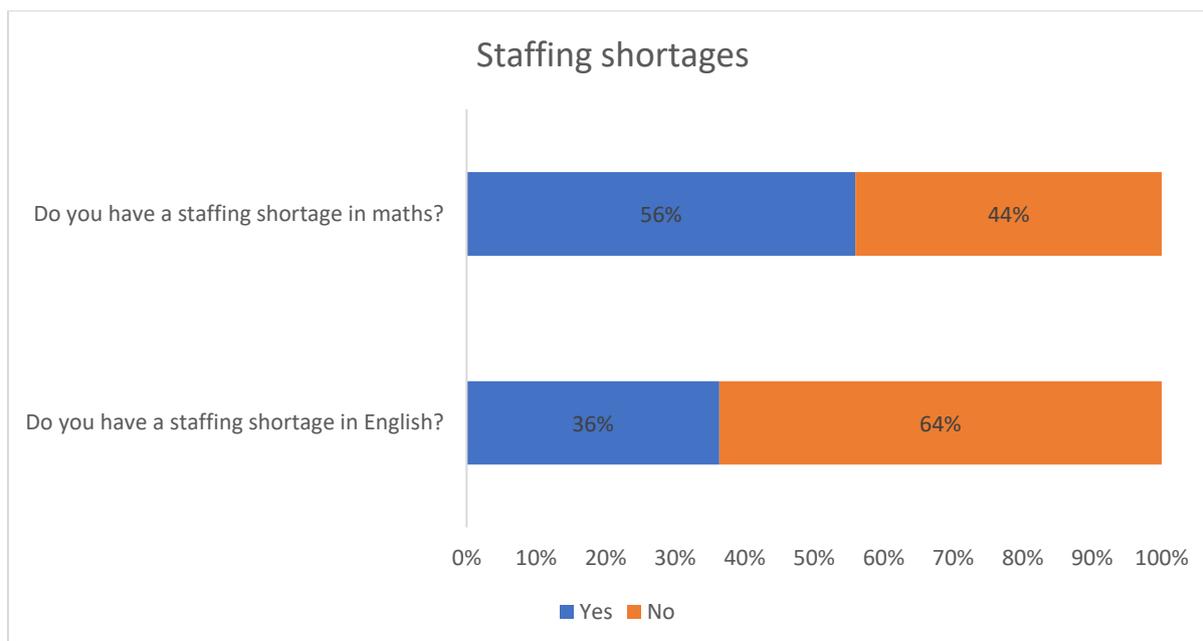
84% wanted the progress measure to be capped at zero (ie: no negative progress).

82% wanted the current 5% tolerance to be raised to 8%.



Staffing

56% of respondents reported that they had a staffing shortage in Maths and 36% 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. The workload and the number of students for which each member of teaching staff has responsibility (200+ mentioned more than once) can be off-putting. Covering staff absence is a challenge for many colleges.

58% of respondents indicated that compulsory college placements for PGCE students would be a good idea to attract staff into FE English and maths. 33% felt it wasn't a good idea with some indicating that it could be off-putting and back fire.

Maths initiatives

Basic maths premium pilot

31 of the respondents are in the basic maths premium pilot. They are using the additional funding on online resources, smaller class sizes, increased teaching hours, targeted intervention and learning support and incentives to encourage attendance and achievement.

Centres for Excellence

Of the 21 Centres for Excellence, 17 responded to the survey (81%). The interventions they are planning include: work with neighbouring institutions, creating networks of maths hubs, a focus on maths mastery and promoting peer observation.

Colleges which are not Centres for Excellence provided mixed feedback as to their involvement at this early stage in the project; some are already clear about

their involvement within a local consortium led by a Centre, but others wanted to know more about how to get involved.

Advanced maths premium

79% of respondents indicated that the introduction of the Advanced maths Premium hasn't encouraged them to expand Level 3 maths provision. 36% indicated that they are already encouraging Level 3 vocational students to undertake Level 3 maths as part of their Study Programme, especially for students on engineering and science courses. Concerns were expressed about the level of funding being insufficient, that colleges need to focus on Level 2 and below and that lack of staff affected their capacity to introduce or to expand Level 3 maths provision. Four colleges are planning to introduce level 3 core maths in 2019/20, some felt that T Levels might positively impact on introducing Level 3 maths.

A number of colleges reported that they already had a high proportion of students studying maths at level 3 prior to the introduction of the premium and would therefore not benefit from the premium.

25% of colleges have addressed the gender gap in Level 3 maths and 46% want to do more to encourage greater take up of Level 3 maths by female students. Colleges mentioned the importance of having female role models within the staff body and actively encouraging female students to take up maths as part of a wider 'women into STEM' strategy.

Adult English and maths

88% of respondents deliver free standing English and maths to 19+ students with 50% seeing an increase in the past five years due to increased demand from local communities. 26% have seen a drop in provision mirroring a drop in demand. There don't appear to be any regional patterns to this.

Regional influencers

Colleges noted that the needs of ESOL students need to be taken into consideration and that in some areas over 70% of students on entry to college do not hold English and or maths GCSEs. One college noted that in their area parents expect that students will work towards GCSE, not functional skills and another noted that there is a lack of comprehensive information transferred from schools.

Other recommendations and views

Other recommendations are to fund English and maths outside the study programme, to remove English and maths from national achievement rates and focus on cpd for staff. 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. At least one college emphasised that they feel that the focus on GCSE is appropriate because of its currency.

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 challenge.