



**Briefing Paper:**

**Findings from an  
Evaluation of Initial  
Assessment  
Materials**

## **An evaluation of initial assessment tools**

### Introduction

As initial assessment of learners has become an increasingly common process in the further education sector, colleges have become keen to seek out the most rigorous and robust tools to help them make early judgements which are valid and reliable. FEDA has received many requests for information about initial assessment tools. In an attempt to provide accurate information about a range of initial assessment materials which are currently on offer to the sector from both publishers and colleges, FEDA commissioned some desk research. Dr Patricia Lindley, a Chartered Occupational Psychologist with Newland Park Associates, carried out the work and a summary of the findings which follows.

The sample of materials considered included those known to, or held by FEDA in November 1999. In addition, publicity materials (demonstration CDs, brochures and sample materials) were used with follow up telephone interviews to clarify aspects of the assessment materials that were not obvious from the publicity materials. The list of materials considered is not an exhaustive list of materials available. FEDA would be pleased to add to this list. Please contact Kelly McCaul on 0171 463 2228 with details of other assessment tools.

This briefing note does not attempt to make recommendations for the use of specific materials or tools. Instead, it provides an overview, in tabular form, of the range of materials considered as well as more detailed factual information about both the assessment process and assessment tools, in textual form. Contact details are provided to enable readers to obtain further detail through follow up enquiries of those that have developed and/or published materials.

Muriel Green

## An Overview of Initial Assessment Materials

Name of Instrument	Attainment	Potential	Generic	Vocationally contextualised	Pre-entry	Entry	Induction	Guidance	Placement	Selection	Support	Communication skills	Numeracy skills	IT skills	Other key skills	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Suitable for test phobics	Suitable for computer phobics	Suitable for administration in large groups	Suitable for individual administration	Produced by
BeST – the screening toolkit for basic skills	■		■				■		■		■	■	■			■	■		■			■	BeST. City and Guilds
Course-based assessment materials	■			■			■				■	■	■			■	■	■		■	■	■	Basingstoke College
Future education and training series (FEATS)		■	■		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■			■	■	■		■	■	■	NFER Nelson
Initial assessment: communications and numeracy	■			■			■				■	■	■			■	■	■		■	■	■	Sheffield College
Initial assessment: an assessment test for reading, writing and maths	■		■				■				■	■	■			■	■				■	■	Basic Skills Agency
Key skills initial assessment	■			■	■	■	■		■	■	■	■	■	■		■	■	■		■	■	■	Thames Valley Enterprise
Key skills profiler	■		■			■	■			■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■				■	Manchester TEC
Key skills profiling assessment	■			■							■	■	■			■	■			■		■	Calderdale College
Key skillbuilder	■		■		■	■	■		■	■	■	■	■			■	■	■		■	■	■	West Notts College
Key skills diagnostic assessment screening for key skills	■		■				■				■	■	■	■		■	■	■				■	York College
Searchlight		■	■			■	■		■	■	■	■	■	■		■	■	■				■	SHL (UK) Ltd
The diagnostics assessment system	■		■				■				■	■	■			■	■	■			■	■	Colchester Institute and Cambridge Regional College

An appendix to this document includes further summary information re: function, focus, scope of materials in easy to assimilate tables

# Timing Function and Purpose of Initial Assessment

## Timing

The term 'Initial Assessment' is used to describe a staged process. Initial assessment processes can be experienced pre-entry, at entry and during induction. Clarification of the process at each of these stages follows.

### Pre-entry

Pre-entry describes the stage at which the student is seeking guidance and direction either for:

- choice of occupation/career.
- for the identification of a suitable course at a college or school.

At this stage, knowledge of vocational interest is of value as well as knowledge of past attainments and future potential.

### Entry

Entry describes the stage at which the student attends or contacts the college to apply for/enrol for a specific course:

- the student may need assessment to ensure that s/he is placed at the correct level or into the most suitable course for their skills and talents and that s/he has the potential to succeed at that level.
- or s/he may be selected from a number of applicants because there is a restricted number of places on the course.

### Induction

Induction describes a process through which the learner is offered an early opportunity to learn more about the college and their individual programme of study:

- at this stage the college should identify the level and kind of learning support needed by individuals and groups of students
- the college and the student may also need to know if the student has the potential to reach the level for which s/he aims.

## Function

Initial assessment is used in a variety of ways to meet the needs of different stakeholders in the initial assessment process.

### Guidance

Guidance describes a process that has different considerations:

- the level of course which will best meet the learners' need
- the vocational area or subjects which best matches the student's occupational interests and aspirations.

Initial assessment at this stage can inform the guidance process and the learner's decisions/choices.

### Selection

Selection describes the process by which students are assessed for their interest and aptitude to benefit from their chosen course of study. Initial assessment at this stage may involve judgements about attainment, interest and potential.

### Induction

Students may be screened in or out of a population of learners who have needs for support with underpinning literacy or numeracy skills. Basic Skills Agency (BSA) screening tests are commonly used to support this process but increasingly colleges are buying in other materials to support the screening process.

Where learners are found to need help, they may be further tested materials designed to identify the specific nature of their learning support needs.

At each of these stages and in each of these situations the information gained from initial assessment tools is only one part of the process. The function of the information is to guide decision making for the college and for the student and this decision should, as always be made in a discussion or interview where additional information may be gathered.

## **Purpose**

The initial assessment materials reviewed fall into two distinct categories:

1. those that measure attainment or achievement
2. those that measure potential.

### Measures of attainment

Measures of attainment look backwards and assess the level of skill and knowledge the student has attained, learned, or achieved. Such measures identify what the student is bringing to the course and what gaps or weaknesses there are in the learning when matched against a target level or course. In this review the gaps are identified by comparing the student's current level of attainment with the level required for the completion of a particular course.

These assessments provide the useful function of identifying where the individual student or groups of students may possibly have a problem and a need for learning support. The information produced can identify the individual students who have failed to give a correct answer to a question and who will need further discussion and assessment of their reasons for this.

The information from the assessment can also help the college or school to estimate the amount of group and individual learning support that will be required by students on a particular course and at a particular level. What they cannot do is estimate whether or not the student has the potential to reach the required level if this support is provided or predict performance in a key skill (such as IT) where no prior learning or experience has taken place.

Assessment materials designed to give a measure of attainment are listed below;

Reviewed from manuals and materials

<b>Name of Instrument</b>	<b>Produced by:</b>
Course Based Assessment Material	Basingstoke College of Technology
Initial Assessment: an assessment test for Reading, Writing and Maths	The Basic Skills Agency
Initial Assessment: Communications and Numeracy	The Sheffield College
Key Skills Diagnostic Assessment: Screening for Key Skills	York College
<b>Key Skills</b> Initial Assessment	Thames Valley Enterprise
Key Skills Profiling Assessment	Calderdale College

Reviewed from promotional/publicity materials

<b>Name of Instrument</b>	<b>Produced by:</b>
BeST The Screening Toolkit for Basic Skills	City and Guilds
<b>KEY SKILLS PROFILER</b>	Reference Point Ltd on behalf of Manchester TEC
KeySKILLBUILDER	West Nottinghamshire College
The Diagnostics Assessment System	Colchester Institute and Cambridge Regional College

They vary in a number of ways. Some of these are:

- the complexity with which they have defined the learning skills required at different levels
- whether they use the same questions with scores which measure different levels of performance to identify the adequacy for work at a certain level or whether they use a distinct set of questions for each level
- the number of levels they assess
- whether they measure the learning skills in a generic way or whether the learning skills are contextualised within occupational areas
- the number of key skills they address
- whether they are aimed at basic skills or key skills.
- whether they are administered, scored and interpreted manually using a paper and pencil format or whether the process is carried out partly or wholly via a computer (PC, CD-ROM or Web Based).

### Measures of Potential

Measures of Potential will inform the college or school and the student of the individual's potential to develop through their chosen course and to measure his/her potential against that of a relevant peer group. This can enable the student to make relevant choices of course pre-entry and can assist the college at the entry stage in guiding students toward programmes where they are most likely to have the ability to succeed. By looking at underlying abilities and utilising data to produce technical information they make it possible to predict likelihood of success. This can be particularly useful for example, in IT where no prior learning or experience has occurred.

If well constructed, these assessment instruments include the analysis of the data collected during the trialling and psychometric development of the test or tests and are able to state the extent to which the test(s) measure:

- how well each question in the test contributes to the overall measure
- how well the same result can be obtained if the student were to be retested
- how the student's results compare to a relevant group, in particular the group to which s/he aspires
- whether the test impacts differently on different groups.

This cannot be done unless the development of the test materials has included the collection and analysis of the results of a large number of individuals. It is only by the collection and analysis of data that those tests that measure attainment, those that assess potential and those that can or cannot measure the impact on different groups can be differentiated.

The following materials measure potential:

#### Assessment instrument reviewed

<b>Name of Instrument</b>	<b>Produced by:</b>
Future Education and Training Series (FEATS)	NFER-Nelson
Searchlight	SHL (UK) Ltd, in collaboration with Hull University and FEDA.

These measures of potential vary in a number of ways:

- the complexity with which they have defined the learning skills required at different levels
- whether they use the same questions but different scores to identify the adequacy for work at a certain level or whether they use a distinct set of questions for each level
- the number of levels they assess
- whether they measure the learning skills in a generic way or whether the learning skills are contextualised within occupational areas
- the number of key skills they address
- whether they are administered, scored and interpreted manually using a paper and pencil format or whether the process is carried out partly or wholly via a computer (PC, CD-ROM or Web Based).

## Focus of Initial Assessment

Discussions with staff in colleges and with the developers of materials uncovered a number of additional aspects on which initial assessment might focus. These included:

- the range of students needing initial assessment
- the breadth covered by the assessment materials i.e. the number of levels and key skills covered by assessment materials
- the acceptability of materials to candidates. For example, the suitability for the test phobic student or for the computer phobic student
- the time taken to administer, score and interpret the materials. For example, can they be used to assess a large group of students at one time? Can they be used for assessing an individual student and reassessing over time?

The focus of specific materials is referenced in both the brief summary of findings from the evaluation of each set of materials, and in the grids set out in the appendix. Contact details and costs are provided for readers who want to obtain further information and/or materials.

## Summary details of specific sets of assessment materials

### **BeST. The Screening Toolkit for Basic Skills: City and Guilds.**

Best (Tapestry) C&G Be Consultancy

12, Trimperley  
Ellesmere  
Shropshire  
SY12 OAE  
01691 624634

#### **Description and use**

This is an IT based test of attainment. It comes as a CD-ROM for installation on to PC. The materials are designed so that they are computer administered, scored and interpreted. The assessor is only required to give a five-minute introduction to the process. There is an optional writing assessment that is hand scored by the assessor.

These materials use common (generic) situations that assess basic skills across vocational areas. They are designed to be used at induction for screening for identification of specific learning support needs. The developers suggest that the results will also inform students about their suitability for placement and courses, but it must be noted that this is only in the sense of the acquisition of basic skills for levels of placement.

The materials include 15 literacy and 15 numeracy tasks which assess the student's achievement in reading, writing, oral communication and number skills. These are measured against the requirements at entry, Level 1 and Level 2 of the Basic Skills Standards. The information is retained for collation. The student's results are prepared and printed as reports

The information can be accessed as:

- an individual report
- assessor group reports
- entire centre report.

These materials measure attainment or achievement of the student in relation to the levels of basic skills. The information gives level of basic skill achieved in each skill on the test, correct and incorrect responses, diagnostic remarks and programme suggestions for the tutor. Testing is carried out on an individual basis

**Cost:** £294.00 plus VAT. Site Licences are available in multiples of 10 at £1999.20 +VAT

#### **Availability**

The materials are available to colleges and schools and others. They do not require specialist testing qualifications.

#### **Summary Statement**

This is a screening test for basic skills achievement to be used at induction. It provides for tutors, an indication of the possible support needs for both individuals and groups. It is also an indication to the college of the overall support need. The tests are computer administered, scored and interpreted and thus will be economical of staff time. The reports indicate which areas of basic skills appear to be a problem and offer suggestions for work to support the need. The publicity materials report a study carried out with students and tutors who found the materials engaging and shows satisfaction with their objectivity and user friendliness.

# Course Based Assessment Material: Basingstoke College of Technology

Basingstoke College  
of Technology  
Worting Road  
Basingstoke  
Hampshire  
RG21 8TN

Jan Marr      01256 306 402

## Description and use

This is a paper based test. The materials (as their name implies) are course based and there are materials for a large variety of courses: BTEC, NVQ, A Level, GCSE, CITB and NNEB. Some of these materials have a common (generic) content that can be used across courses. For the GNVQ there are materials for the following courses: Business Administration, Health and Social Care, Information Technology, Leisure and Tourism, Art and Design, Built Environment, Engineering, Media, Science, Sports

The materials support is a screening process and is designed to be used during the induction process. The accompanying booklet contains a useful guide to the organisation of screening. The results come from the analysis of the scores and when this point is reached the result will indicate the support needs of the student for the benefit of the tutor.

The sample materials contain no specific guidance on administration or the interpretation of information. There is a supporting leaflet that provides a rationale for using the materials and the results. The package has been developed from its use in college by the specialist basic skills tutors

It is designed to be used at induction for identification of specific learning support needs

**Cost:** For each Skill for each Course the cost of materials is £17.50 or for a complete set of skills within the course, £45.00. These prices include a marking grid and where required, an answer sheet.

Some materials can be used on more than one course.

## Availability

The materials are available on order for schools, colleges and others.

## Summary Statement

These paper-based materials are designed to sample the key skill content of various courses at a specified level. The materials have been designed so that the reading level is compatible with that required at the level being tested. The results give an indication of the level of support a student may need on a course of his/her choice and informs staff of common support needs across the group. The assessment will be easily carried out, the marking and analysis will not be a speedy process.

## **Future Education and Training Series (FEATS): NFER-Nelson**

Customer Support

NFER- Nelson (ASE):

Darville House  
2 Oxford Road East  
Windsor  
Berks SL14 1DF  
01753 858961

### **Description and use**

This is a paper-based set of psychometric instruments which have been designed to help young people and adults who are in the process of considering their future training options. They will also aid those responsible for offering the guidance essential for informed decision making.

It consists of 12 separate tests that are collected into four modules. Each of the tests and modules can be used individually. The four modules are:

1. Module 1A and 1B: Key word and Number Skills. assess learned Literacy and Numeracy skills (attainment) and Verbal and Numerical ability (potential). The individual tests are: Reading skills, Verbal Ability, Number Skills, Numerical Ability and Writing Skills
2. Module 2: Visual Processing. This module assesses the ability (potential) to understand and reason on a non-verbal and non-numerical setting. This module measures the potential of students who lack English language and numerical skills to learn and reason and to use letters and numbers in a clerical checking task where there is no comprehension or manipulation of numbers to be considered. Within this module there are three tests: Non verbal ability, Checking and Accuracy and Spatial Ability.
3. Module 3 :Personal Qualities. This module measures the personal qualities of a student that will impact on their responses in a training or employment situation. This module has three assessments: Personal Skills Inventory, Motivation Inventory and Learning Preference Inventory
4. Module 4 Vocational Guidance Questionnaire. This assessment measures a student's preference for working in an occupational area. The Occupational areas are based on the Careers Library Classification Index and are divided into Working with people, Working with the Practical, and Working with Information, Words and Data. Within these broad areas there is further break down into subcategories. It does not relate to specific job titles.

When all modules are used together as a test battery this can be used as predictor of success in a particular training area or as a guidance instrument to identify a range of alternative career or training choices.

There has been extensive research with training providers: tutors, managers, FE college principals, careers guidance practitioners, admissions staff and careers guidance people in schools and service companies to establish the need and the criteria for an assessment instrument. The collection of tests was trialled on students to ensure that the group against which future students would be measured was representative of NVQ, SVQ, GNVQ and GSVQ students, ethnic mix and regional spread. Finally, the development ensured that students spanning 9 different NVQ framework areas were included. The set of tests is so designed that the same materials can be given to all students but the results can be interpreted for suitability (placement, selection, guidance, potential) and the need for support at different levels and for different occupational areas. Sample case studies are given to illustrate this. There is a clear six-stage guide to producing hand written reports based on the interpretation of the scores. This includes a learning development plan with guidance and a proforma to assist in producing this. Alternatively a computer generated narrative report can be produced by and bought from the test publishers.

The manual includes guidance on the use of such reports when giving feedback to an individual.

<b>Costs:</b> Complete reference set (One copy of each test booklet and each answer sheet	£175.00+VAT
For each module	
Question books (reusable)	£85 for 10 booklets
Answer sheets	£15.00 for 25 + VAT
Writing skills booklets	£40.00 for 25 +VAT
Additional Scoring Keys Complete set	£45.00
Bureau produced Computer Generated Reports	£12.00 each

### **Availability**

These materials are only available to those who hold the British Psychological Society's Certificate or Statement of Competence in Occupational Testing at Level A

### **Summary Statement**

This is a set or battery of paper-based tests that can be used at all stages of the process for students entering Levels 2 and 3 of GNVQ and GSVQ II and III. Its construction is such that it looks at both the skills and knowledge that have been attained and the abilities that identify potential. These qualities allow the instrument not only to measure where the student is now (i.e. attainment level) but also to measure the potential for development on the course selected. The manual contains and uses technical information necessary to demonstrate that it is a valid and a reliable test in the psychometric sense. The Vocational Choice test measures not only the student's wish lists of work choices but also provides the evidence to look at how strong those choices are. The full range of tests set out to measure the underpinning skills and abilities relating to Levels two and Three of the NVQ and GNVQ and to give guidance for choice of Occupational Area

As with all tests that use psychometric measurement, the test user (that is the person who decides how the test is to be used and who interprets the results) needs to hold the British Psychological Society's Certificate of Competence in Occupational Testing at Level A, as a condition of purchase.

Administration and scoring can be carried out by non-certificated staff but under the supervision of trained Level A test users. It is essential that the administration be carried out in a structured and standard manner for which full instructions are given. This is to maintain the integrity of the tests.

## Initial Assessment Communications and Numeracy: The Sheffield College

Carol Cotton  
Sheffield College:

Training and Enterprise  
The Sheffield College  
Loxley Centre  
Myers Grove Lane  
Sheffield S6 5JL  
0114 260 2268

### Description and use

This is a paper-based set of initial assessment materials presented in a photocopiable ringbinder. The manual contains very clear information about the purpose of the materials and instruction for their administration, scoring and interpretation.

The communications materials comprise a writing exercise, cloze exercises and a dictation. The written and dictation are generic, the cloze exercises have some common content and in addition materials suitable for the following work areas: Business and Secretarial, Catering and Hospitality, Construction, (Brickwork, painting and decorating and plumbing, Hairdressing, Leisure and Tourism, Motor vehicle work, Retail and distribution.

The numeracy exercises are self-assessment and are done through a can do, can't do card sort. The resultant score coupled with that from a 40-question exercise are related to GNVQ and National Curriculum stages.

The materials are designed to be used at induction for the identification of learning support needs. They assess attainment and indicate vocationally contextualised knowledge relating to specific key skills of communication and numeracy.

**Costs:** The materials are priced in three bands according to the size of the college (FTE's). The prices given represent the bottom (under 1000 FTE's) and the top (4001+ FTE's) band.

Communications (mainstream)	£100 - £450
Communications (LDD)	£90 - £380
Numeracy Mainstream	£100 - £450
Numeracy LDD	£60 - £280
Communications + Numeracy Mainstream	£150 - £750
Communications and Numeracy Mainstream and LDD	£255 - £1190

The numeracy packs contain 10 packs of maths cards. Additional packs are available at £150. All materials are priced exclusive of Postage end packing.

### Availability

The materials are generally available for colleges and schools. There is no specialist testing qualification required.

### Summary Statement

The initial assessment package is a broad mechanism for establishing learning support needs. It is not to be used as a device to screen out students and create a barrier to entry. It assesses the attainment level of the student giving an indication of the level of communication and numeracy support needed.

## **Initial Assessment: an assessment test for Reading, Writing and Maths: The Basic Skills Agency**

The Basic Skills  
Agency  
Commonwealth  
House  
1-19 New Oxford  
Street  
London WC1A 1NU  
0207 405 4017

### **Description and use**

These initial assessment materials are paper-based and photocopiable and are designed as an assessment test for basic skills in reading, writing and maths. Full instructions are given for administration, marking and recording along with master copies for making marking keys. Master copies for making marking transparencies are provided. These materials have a common (generic) section to be used across vocational areas.

These assessment tasks have been designed to relate to the standards produced by the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) in the early 1990s which describe 'how and at what level people need to use communication and numerical skills when doing particular tasks'. The levels of the BSA standards have been mapped onto the QCA levels one, two and three. Additionally they include an 'entry' level. The outcome is a profile that relates the basic skill level at which the student is operating to the key skill level and provides a record of the scores across all assessments. A profile of the results is produced manually as a record of the scores and outcomes for the student. This assessment material does not set out to measure in any scientific way the level of attainment. Its sole purpose is to indicate that there may be a need for learning support in number, writing and reading and that further assessment is required. It can be used on an individual or group basis.

The authors suggest that those operating below the entry level will be likely to face considerable difficulty in achieving a successful outcome on the NVQ/GNVQ programmes.

It is recommended that the assessment be used to screen individuals at induction to enable the college to offer learning support as early as possible. The manual suggests that the materials can also be used in work place assessment, in training programmes and in prisons.

**Costs:** Initial cost of the manual and Master copies of all materials is £9.00  
Once purchased all materials can be photocopied for educational use and there is no restriction on the usage. The only cost involved is that incurred by copying.

### **Availability**

This assessment material is available from The Basic Skills Agency .It requires no specialist skill or qualification for purchase, administration, scoring or interpretation.

### **Summary Statement**

This set of assessment materials largely meets the purpose for which it was designed. That is, to alert the tutor at induction that there may be a need for support and that the student will need further diagnosis and assessment to clarify this. There will be potential for problems if this is used beyond this clear and simple purpose and if the results are overinterpreted either diagnostically or as a clear indication of the individual's level of attainment. There is no support or claim for either of these interpretations,

## **Key Skills Initial Assessment: Thames Valley Enterprise**

ThamesValley  
Enterprise:  
Pacific House  
Imperial Way  
Reading  
Berks  
RG2 0TF  
0118 9214000

### **Description and use**

This set of initial assessment materials is paper based and comes as a ringbinder with photocopiable pages. Some parts are self-administered and others are administered and assessed by tutors. There are clear instructions for tutor and student administration of the materials. For the tutor to operate the assessment process, there are answer sheets and scoring sheets to identify which kinds of questions the student has got right and wrong. There are also directions for mapping the information gathered on the course and for planning the assessment of skills in the context of the course. The administration by the tutor could be carried out quickly but the processing of the information on an individual basis would take a much longer time.

These materials have a separate contextualised section for the following vocational areas: Administration, Care, Engineering, Hospitality, Motor Trades, and Retail. There are also materials that are specific to the GNVQ Key Skills of Communication, Application of Number and IT at levels 1,2 and 3. Some of the materials in the folder are for NVQ mapping and some for assessing in the work place.

These are complex and comprehensive materials designed to provide the means for assessment for a number of different purposes. They provide materials for the assessment of key skills for a number of different courses and qualifications among which are the GNVQ qualifications. They cover self-assessment by the student, assessment administered by the tutor, and records for contextualised assessment during work or training. Each section has clear information about the purpose for which the materials are to be used. If all the materials are used, the student will have an action plan to enable him/her to plan the development and attainment of competence and a record of all the skills and subskills acquired during the GNVQ course.

**Costs:** This was not available at the time of writing.

### **Availability**

The materials are freely available to colleges, schools and others. There is no requirement for a specialist testing qualification.

### **Summary Statement**

These are multi-purpose materials for initial assessment of key skills. They encompass tools for tutors, assessors and candidates on vocational and non-vocational programmes. They cover GNVQ assessment among these. The use of self-assessment for identifying need and the documents for planning and recording assessment through the course are a unique feature of these materials. Some time would be needed to become familiar with content and the uses of the different sections. The producers recommend staff development and there is a real need for a familiarisation workshop before the materials are introduced and used.

## **KEY SKILLS PROFILER: Reference Point Ltd on behalf of Manchester TEC**

Manchester TEC

Mary Hoarty  
0161 2367222  
Reference Point Ltd  
PO Box 609  
Octagon Court  
Octagon Parade  
High Wycombe  
HP11 2XU  
Telephone 01494  
510932

### **Description and use**

These initial assessment materials are computer based. They can be installed onto a standalone PC or onto a network. The materials are administered scored and interpreted by computer as an integral part of the package.

The information stresses that this is not a test but a self-report by the student. As such the answer entry module matches the student's responses to the Level of Key or personal skill selected by the computer from an initial matching exercise. Once the selected level has been completed, the student can then elect to try an additional assessment of harder or easier level of assessment. Alternatively s/he can elect to move to a different key or personal skill where s/he takes an another matching exercise and is allocated to a selected level by the computer.

The supervisor module allows the supervisor to view the data 'at all levels' for a single student. This module presents matches for all the levels and skills attempted by the student. The alternative is the 'single level' that allows the supervisor to view all the data for all students at a single level.

The reports are presented graphically and show the extent to which an individual has achieved: No match, Low match, Medium match, High match, Total match.

**Costs:** Single user licence is £399 with an annual software support contract of £75  
Site licence for multiusers is £999 with an annual software support contract of £150.00. **These prices were valid until 31/07/99.**

The licence is accompanied by a contract for software support.

### **Availability**

The materials are available for Colleges, schools and others. There is no requirement for a formal testing qualification.

### **Summary Statement**

This is a self-report system which relates the answers to key and personal skills at Levels 1-5. It measures attainment in all the skills and the tutor can obtain information about the need for support in a group or for an individual student. It is intended to be used before enrolment and to indicate a support need or an appropriate start level for a student. It does not claim to measure potential and the results should not be translated as meaning this. As an assessment of attainment it is an indicator rather than a firm identifier.

## Skills Profiling Assessment: Calderdale College

Maria Gilling  
Effective Student Profiling  
School of Foundation Studies  
Calderdale College  
Francis St  
Halifax  
HX1 3UZ  
01422 357 357

### Description and use

These initial assessment materials are produced in a paper-based photocopiable (within purchasing institution) ringbinder. Full administration, marking and recording instructions are given. Answers are provided for each exercise. Interpretation is at individual and class level. The materials were produced at Calderdale College as an FEU project. They were developed initially for students entering Business and Business administration Courses. They were then trialled and extended to cover other vocational areas. These materials have a common (generic) section to be used across vocational areas and a separate contextualised section for the following vocational areas: Art Design and media, Business Administration, Catering and Hospitality, Construction, Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy, Health, Care and Childcare, Information Technology, Sports, Leisure and Tourism.

The communication materials have been based on the QCA key communication skills, taking full account of the implied underpinning knowledge or subskills. There is no rationale for the numerical skills. Although not stated the information available suggests that these materials could be used at induction for identification of specific learning support needs. The materials contain a marking sheet that indicates the areas in which incorrect answers have been given. These produce an individual and a group profile. There is a tracking document that relates the incorrect answers to particular key skills

The individual profiles and group profile are produced manually as a record of the scores and outcomes for the individual and the group. The assessment points out the areas of possible weakness to assist language tutors and the tutors on vocational courses to identify possible areas of concern

This assessment material sets out to diagnose whether each and every student in a group is *Competent, Coping or Needing support* in communication skills at the three levels of GNVQ on a variety of vocational courses. It assesses application of numeracy skills at Foundation and Intermediate levels of GNVQ. Where a weakness is identified there are tests of attainment in Concept, Calculation and Application.

**Costs:** £149.00. After purchase materials can be photocopied for use within the purchasing institution.

**Availability:** This assessment material is available from Calderdale College. It requires no specialist testing qualification for administration, scoring, or interpretation.

### Summary Statement

This set of assessment materials shows a wealth of careful and painstaking material developed for both generic and vocationally specific assessment. It works well, as an indicator of the possible support needs for the individual student and for the group. It was designed to diagnose specific areas of weakness in numerical skills. It is more accurate to say that the results indicate possible areas of weakness, which need to be further investigated. It assesses where students are likely to need support; it does not allow any assessment of what the student might achieve if this support is given.

The results should not be overinterpreted.

## keySKILLBUILDER: West Nottinghamshire College

Pauline Paley  
Development manager  
West Nottinghamshire College  
Derby Road  
Mansfield  
Nottinghamshire  
NG18 5BH  
01623 627191

### Description and use

These initial assessment materials are available as a paper-based or as a computer based resource. The materials were developed initially to measure level of skill attainment in basic skills and in key skills and to be used in West Nottinghamshire College and its Consortium. They have been on general sale since 1998. In addition to the assessment; the keySKILLBUILDER provides the purchaser with skills action planning and skill development through the learning materials incorporated in the total kit.

The first assessment materials were developed in 1994 and used in 1995 and 1996. Level 2 materials were further developed in 1996/7 and piloted on 2,000 students within the college and in 14 link schools. The materials were evaluated and the evaluation led to the materials being expanded from only Level 2 to cover Entry to all three levels, and Key Skills Levels 1, 2 and 3. Learning materials have been developed at all these levels. The materials have a common (generic) approach at every level and are used for identification of specific learning support needs. This is provided by an assessment of the level of skill attained by students.

There is a tracking and action planning document for the individual student. Results are presented on this. The result can be interpreted as to whether the student needs support and if so in what specific area of skill. The result signposts the student to the relevant learning support workbook to develop the indicated area of skill.

**Costs:** The paper based materials cost varies between £950.00 and £1950.00 depending on status (college or school) and level of FEFC funding. The annual licence fee based on a three year licence agreement for the CD-ROM varies between £400+VAT and £1995+VAT depending on: membership of keySKILLBUILDERS network, Number of levels and Number of skills purchased.

### Availability

The materials are available with no special training.

### Summary Statement

These materials are a painstaking and innovative approach to integrating assessment and support materials in one complete package. In terms of assessment they measure attainment in both basic and key skills. They do not set out to provide an assessment of occupational or course preferences nor have they been constructed to measure the potential of the students. They measure (and then provide supportive learning) for skills attainment. They are provided in paper format as well as on screen.

## Screening for Key Skills: York College

Clare Dickens  
York College of Further and  
Higher Education  
Tadcaster Road  
Dringhouses  
York  
YO2 1UA  
01904 770234  
The college also has a website  
for the assessment materials:  
<http://www.yorkcollege.com.screening>

### Description and use

These initial assessment materials are computer based and installed from CD-ROM or diskettes. Paper based versions are available on request. The administration, scoring and interpretation are integrated into the computer-based package. The assessment materials are generic and are related to the key skills of communication application of number and IT at three levels. Each level is assessed separately. It is designed to be used at induction for identification of specific learning support needs. It is currently available for stand alone PC's but will later be available for networks. There are assessment reports that show the scores obtained by the student across the key skills and the levels.

The results can be printed for the individual or for all students on a particular course.

**Costs:** Single key skill Package at levels 1,2 and 3      £ 95.00

With option to upgrade to full screening in one month @    £145.00

Full screening package of all three key skills at all 3 levels £195.00

The software for the assessment materials is available for 14 days on a trial basis. After this period it must be used on licence.

### Availability

Available for schools and colleges with no specialist test qualification required.

### Summary Statement

This assessment material has been designed to screen students at induction for support needs on their chosen course. It also gives the tutor information about the group support needs. It is flexible and allows the student to carry out assessment at more than one session and allows tutors to decide what assessment the student needs to attempt (by key skill and by level). It is not timed or pressured but the time taken to complete each level is recorded. The tutor investigates and supports the student's learning needs using the information as a beginning point.

## **Searchlight: SHL (UK) Ltd.**

Sue Beadle 01482 643872

**OR**

SHL UK Ltd  
The Pavilion,  
1 Atwell Place,  
Thames Ditton,  
KT7 0NE  
0208 335 8000

### **Description and use**

These initial assessment materials are computer based. They are installed from a CD ROM and are for installation as a stand-alone or intranet based system, with accompanying documentation and user guides. All items use a simple 5-choice format with a single mouse click to choose and then a second click on 'next' to move on. No time limit is imposed. The content is generic. The construction of the tests provides a matrix mapping specific ability tests onto key skills. The tests are not measures of attainment, but forward-looking measures intended to identify areas of strength and development needs in the abilities that underpin the key skills. The test is intended for use with people who have basic numeracy and literacy skills, and who do not have marked disabilities (e.g. able to read a computer screen, physically unable to operate a mouse or compatible pointing device). The tests are not designed to assess specifically for dyslexia, and people with known, pronounced dyslexia should be assessed in alternative fashions.

The manual advises on how to assess people with disabilities.

It is designed to assess potential and help judge the 'fit' of individual students to courses in terms of likelihood of success. As such it may be used in guidance to ensure that the level of the course a student takes is appropriate, and for aiding placement by matching course profiles to ability profiles. It is not intended as a general-purpose screening tool for basic skills.

Sequences of ability tests are selected by the system on the basis of profiles set up by the administrator. Pre-set profiles exist for each of the nine Key Skills by Levels combinations (e.g. IT, Level 2; Communications, Level 3; and so on). Course profiles can be set up by selecting mixtures of Key Skills at various levels. Reports are generated to give a graphical illustration of how well the student 'fits' the course or Key Skill profile.

Each test provides two scores: one relating to mental 'Power' and the other to mental 'Efficiency'. The 'Power' score is calculated from the number correct. The Efficiency score is calculated using a time to respond measure and looks at processing efficiency. Both measures are represented using 5-grade (A-E) system.

The materials have been developed according to the technical and psychological principles of test construction. Mapping abilities onto QCA 2000 key skill specifications for Number, IT and Communication began the development. The content of the questions was developed in collaboration with a consortium of 7 large colleges to specifications developed by psychologists. Extensive trials have been carried out with over 2000 students in the 7 colleges providing the scores that form the technical data. The developers have produced a series of short (c. 5minute) tests each containing around 10-14 questions. The group scores against which the individual student's results are compared are derived from the scores of the students in the consortium colleges. Details of this sample such as age gender ethnicity etc. and the numbers of people in each of these subgroups are provided in the technical manual.

The test is scored and interpreted by the computer package which produces customised reports.

5 types of report are provided. All the individual reports interpret the results in key skills terminology and provide a lead in to action planning outcomes.

1. Individual student reports for Levels 1 and 2
2. Individual student reports for Level 3. These individual reports are intended to be given to the student following a feedback discussion with learning support or course team member.
3. Learning support staff or course team members' report. These reports are for the 'Authorised Users' of the system and provide more detail and diagnosis than the student reports.
4. Group reports (where people are grouped by, for example, course or key skill) summarise results for groups of people all of whom have completed the same test profile (sequence of tests).
5. Management information reports provide high level summaries of performance across the college.

A sixth report is in preparation. This will be a National comparison report that will provide college administration with data on the performance of their students and comparisons with national norms on each test.

**Costs:** Annual licence per college varies by size of college from £1750 to £4000pa for intranet version, £500 less for stand-alone. Intranet version provides additional group and college-wide report options and link to national norms database. Upgrade from standalone option to Intranet £650.

The licence provides for unlimited usage and report generation for college's own students or applicants for course in the college. Provider licences are available for third party testing (apply to SHL for details).

### **Availability**

Full system has been available from 2 September 1999. A standard condition of the SHL Licence is that colleges take responsibility for ensuring that the authorised users of the system are competent to use the product. SHL will provide development and training opportunities for users through their Supported Assessment approach. The standards expected of users are exemplified in the British Psychological society's educational Testing Foundation Level Qualification (currently in draft form).

### **Summary Statement**

Searchlight has been designed by chartered occupational psychologists with the co-operation and help of colleges to assess student potential. It has the necessary data to support this and the computer delivery design allows for the data to be collected and the information updated. It is quick and easy to deliver and provides reports for a variety of purposes. It has not been designed to assess basic skills, dyslexia, vocational choice or attainment of students at entry and cannot be used for these purposes.

## The Diagnostics Assessment System: Colchester Institute and Cambridge Regional College

Bob Fisher  
Manager Curriculum  
Development Unit  
Colchester Institute  
Sheepen Rd  
Colchester  
Essex  
CO3 3LL  
Tel: 01206 518 000

And  
Penny Buckingham  
Key Skills Centre manager  
Cambridge regional College  
Kings Hedges Rd  
Cambridge  
CB4 2QT  
Tel: 01223 418316

### Description and use

These initial assessment materials are available in computer based and as paper based formats. The paper-based comes with photocopying rights. The computer-based version includes administration, scoring and interpreting the tests and relating them to the appropriate levels (1-3) of the three Key Skills assessed. The paper and pencil version gives a clear guide to usage and interpretation and provides a set of answers on disk and in hard copy and Photocopiable answer sheets. These materials have a common (generic) basis. They assess the level of attainment in relation to the subskills and knowledge underpinning NVQ/GNVQ Levels 1,2,3 in application of number, communication and IT. The materials are designed to be used across vocational areas. The materials, both paper based and computer based allow for flexible implementation and for colleges and schools to tailor the assessment and profiling to their own needs. Both the paper based and the computer-based materials can produce a detailed breakdown of correct and incorrect answers at each level. Where there is an incorrect answer the print out guides the tutor and student to the type of support required. The support is specified in detail such as 'Seek help in using a question mark' or 'fractions'. From the data the student is assigned to a level dependent on the percentage of correct answers. The computer-based assessments allow group comparisons to be made. This can be done with the paper-based materials but is a more time consuming process. There is a reporter programme, which analyses the data to produce a series of comparative graphics and summary information. This is in addition to the individual profiles which can be recalled if required.

This assessment material was designed to: " provide an indication of potential to achieve key skills 1 to 3".

A study based on follow up data is planned which will investigate the reliability of the assessments and the predictive strength of the diagnostic aspects of the assessment.

<b>Cost:</b> Paper based Application of Number	£200.00 +VAT
Paper based Communications	£200.00 +VAT
Paper based I T Key Skill	£200.00 +VAT
Computer based Application of Number + Communications	£1000.00 +VAT
Package of Paper based and computer based Application of Number + Communications	£1200 +VAT

Package of Paper based IT + computer based Application of Number and Communications £1125 +VAT

**Availability**

The materials are available to schools and colleges. They can be obtained from either Colchester or Cambridge. They do not require a specialist testing qualification.

**Summary Statement**

This is a test of attainment that is based on the underpinning subskills and knowledge related to the key skills at levels 1, 2 and 3. It is useful for highlighting those areas where a student has not produced a correct answer and it give precise information to the tutor and student of where there appears to be a weakness. The availability of computer and paper based versions leads to flexible assessment for a variety of purposes. It is not a predictive test at the moment but the development is continuing and the information from its use is being collected to facilitate further studies. At the moment it is a measure of attainment.

# Appendix

## A summary of initial assessment tools

Assessment Tool	Format	Function	Focus	Scope	Level	Development	Scoring Reporting	Suitability for Use	Cost	Contact Details
BeST The Screening Toolkit for Basic Skills <i>City and Guilds</i>	IT based, comes as a CD ROM	Assesses attainment	Basic skills of reading writing verbal communication and number	Use generic materials to assess basic skills across vocational areas	Screening at Entry level 1 and level 2 of the Basic Skills Standards		Objective scoring by the computer. Reports printed for individuals groups, whole centre	For use at induction to identify individual support needs. Reports offer suggestions for work to support the need	£294.00 Plus VAT Site licences in multiples of 10 and £1999.20 plus VAT	BeST Consultancy 01691 624634
Course Based Assessment Material <i>Basingstoke</i>	Paper based materials	Assesses attainment	Samples key skill contact of various courses at specified levels	Designed for a wide variety of post 16 provision some generic some specific to Business Admin, Health and Social Care, IT, Leisure and Tourism, Art and Design, Built Environment Engineering, Media, Science Sports	Screening at level 1, 2 and 3	Developed from use in college by specialist and basic skills tutors Designed so that the reading level is compatible with that required at the level being tested	Results come from the analysis of scores from manual marking	For use at induction to identify support needs	£45.00 for a course or £17.50 per skill. Price includes a marking grid and answer sheet	Jan Marr Basingstoke College 01256 306402
Future Education and Training Series (FEATS) <i>NFER-Nelson</i>	Paper based. A set of 12 separate tests in 4 modules: Keyword and number Visual processing Personal qualities Vocational guidance	Assesses attainment and potential	Assesses skills, knowledge attainment and measures abilities that identify potential	When all 4 modules are used together as a test battery it can be used as a predictor of success in a particular training area as well as identifying support needs, across different levels and occupational areas	Level 2 and 3	Extensive research with training providers tutors manager's admissions staff, careers guidance to establish the need and the criteria for an assessment instrument. A manual contains and uses technical information to demonstrate it is a valid and reliable test	Test user needs to hold a British Psychological Society's certificate of competence at level A. Administration and scoring can be done by non-certificated staff but under supervision of trained level A users	As a predictor of success in a particular area or to support guidance	Complete reference set (one of each test book plus answers) £175.00 plus VAT per module £85 for 10 booklets (only available to level A test users)	Customer Support 01753 858961

Assessment Tool	Format	Function	Focus	Scope	Level	Development	Scoring Reporting	Suitability for Use	Cost	Contact Details
Initial Assessment Communications and Numeracy <i>Sheffield College</i>	Paper based set of materials presented in a photocopiable ring binder	Assesses attainment the package provides a broad mechanism for establishing learning support needs	Communication and Numeracy	Written and dictation exercises are generic. Additional materials are suitable for Business and Secretarial, Catering and Hospitality, Construction, Hairdressing Leisure and Tourism, Motor Vehicle Retail. Numeracy are self assessment exercises	Screening at level 1, 2 and 3		A manual provides clear information about the purpose, administration scoring and interpretation	For use at induction to identify support needs	Priced in 3 bands according to size of college Communications (mainstream) £100-£450 Communication and Numeracy mainstream £150-£750	Carol Cotton 0114 260 2268
Initial Assessment: an assessment test for Reading, Writing and Maths <i>Basic Skills Agency</i>	Paper based and photocopiable	To alert to the need for support and that a student needs further assessment and diagnosis to clarify this	Basic skills in reading writing and maths relates to standards produced by the Basic Skills Agency	Common generic sections to be used across vocational areas	Levels have been mapped onto QCA level 1, 2 and 3 as well as including 'entry' level. The out come is a profile that relates to the basic skills level.		Instructions given for administration marking and recording. Master copies for marking transparencies are provided	To be used in induction to alert the tutor to a need for support. To be clarified through further assessment	£9.00 for manual and master for photocopying	Basic Skills Agency 0207 405 4017

Assessment Tool	Format	Function	Focus	Scope	Level	Development	Scoring Reporting	Suitability for Use	Cost	Contact Details
KEY SKILLS PROFILER <i>Manchester TEC</i>	Computer base. Can be installed onto a PC or onto a network		Key and personal skills	The information stresses that this is not a test but a self report by the student	Levels 1-5		The materials are scored and interpreted by computer as an integral part of the practice. Reports are presented graphically	It is intended to be used before enrolment and to indicate a support need or an appropriate start level for a student. It does not claim to measure potential and results should not be translated as meaning that it gives an independent attainment rather than a firm identified	Single user licence £399 Site licence for multi users £999. The licence is accompanied by a contract for software support for which there is an additional fee	Mary Wilkinson 01612367222 Reference Point Ltd 01494 510932
Key Skills Profiling Assessment <i>Calderdale College</i>	Paper based photocopiable in a ring binder	An indicator of possible support needs for the individual student and for the group. Where results indicate possible weakness this needs to be further investigated		Both generic and vocationally specific. Contextualised sections focus on Art and Design Media Business Administration Catering and Hospitality Construction Hair and Beauty Health and Social Care IT Sport Leisure and Tourism	Communications at levels 1-3 AON at levels 1 and 2	Initial development through an externally funded project	Full administration marking and recording instructions are given answers are provided for each exercise. Interpretation at individual and class level. Individual and group profiles can be produced manually as a record of the scores and outcomes	To set out to diagnose whether students are competent, coping or needing support	£149.00 materials can be photocopied	Maria Gilling 01422 357357

Assessment Tool	Format	Function	Focus	Scope	Level	Development	Scoring Reporting	Suitability for Use	Cost	Contact Details
KeySKILLBUILDER W <i>Notts. College</i>	Paper based or as computer based resource	To measure level of skills attainment in Basic Skills and in Key Skills in addition the materials provide for skills action planning and skills development through learning materials	Materials have a generic approach. They provide tracking and action planning materials as well as support materials	Entry level through to levels 1, 2 and 3	Entry level 1, 2 and 3	Developed over time and piloted on 2,000 students across 15 institutions	Instructional given for administration and marking/scoring	They measure skills attainment and provide support materials	Paper based materials cost between £950 and £1950 depending on college size. Annual licence fee on a 3 year agreement for the CD ROM varies between £400 plus VAT and £1995 plus VAT	Pauline Paley 01623 627191
Key Skills Diagnostic Assessment Screening for Key Skills <i>York College</i>	Computer based installed from CD-ROM or diskette and paper based variations available on request. Currently available for stand alone PCs but under development for networks	Designed to screen students to identify support needs on their chosen course	Key Skills of communications AON, IT	Generic materials	Levels 1, 2 and 3		Assessment reports that show the score obtained by the student across the key skills and levels. Results can be printed for individuals or for groups	Suitable for flexible assessment of students at induction. Allows the student to carry out assessment at more than one session. Allows tutors to decide what assessment the student needs to attempt. Not timed but the time taken to record each level is recorded	Single key skill package at levels 1, 2 and 3 £95.00. Full screening package all 3 levels £195.00 available on trial (for 14 days)	Clare Dickens 01904 770234

Assessment Tool	Format	Function	Focus	Scope	Level	Development	Scoring Reporting	Suitability for Use	Cost	Contact Details
Searchlight <i>SHL UK</i>	Computer based stand alone PC or intranet system	To assess student potential and help judge the "fit" of individual courses in terms of likelihood of success	The construction of the tests provides a matrix mapping specific ability tests onto key skills	Generic context the tests are forward looking measurers intended to identify areas of strength and development needs in the abilities that underpin key skills	Levels 1, 2 and 3	Designed by chartered occupational psychologists and developed and trailed with the co-operation and help of colleges to assess student potential. Trailed with 2000 students to produce technical data which backs up the product	Computer package scores interprets and reports on potential There are individual group and centre reports	Guidance and placement, identifies support needs.	£1750 to £4000 per annum for intranet version	Sue Beadle 01482 643872
The Diagnostics Assessment System <i>Colchester and Cambridge</i>	Computer-based and in paper based formats paper based comes with photocopying rights	Assesses attainment but the development is continuing and the information from its use is being collected to facilitate further studies	Assess the subskills and knowledge underpinning NVQ/GNVQ key skills of communication AON and IT	Materials are designed to be used across vocational areas	Levels 1, 2 and 3		Computer based include administration scoring and interpreting the tests and relating them to the appropriate levels where there is an incorrect answer the print out guides the tutor and student to the type of support required. The support is specified in detail	For use during induction		Bob Fisher 01206 518 000 penny Buckingham 01223 418 316