Basic Skills Quality Initiative

# Guide to the Basic Skills Quality Initiative

THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL

# Contents

Basic Skills Quality Initiative


| | |
|---|---|
| Foreword by Jim Donaldson, chief inspector and director of audit | **2** |
| Introduction | **4** |
| The Development of the BSQI | **5** |
| The Materials | **7** |
| • The Units | **7** |
| • Using the Materials | **9** |
| • The Basic Skills Facilitator | **9** |
| The Six-Stage Process for Quality Improvement | **10** |
| BSQI Contributors and Working Group | **12** |

Basic Skills Quality Initiative

# Foreword

By Jim Donaldson

Chief inspector and director of audit, FEFC

**THE FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL**

**All learners are entitled to high-quality basic skills provision. Making sure learners can read, write and use numbers confidently is part of the core business of further education. These skills give learners the opportunity to take part in education and training, to complete programmes of learning successfully and to progress to employment or further study.**

Since 1993, inspectors have reported unsatisfactory standards in this crucial area and identified the need to improve the quality of this provision. It is clear that the hard-working and committed managers and teachers of basic skills need more help. In particular, they need support to tackle issues arising from inspection and to implement the national standards and the basic skills curriculum resulting from the Moser report, *Improving Literacy and Numeracy: A fresh start.*

The Council's Standards Fund was established to help provide the resources needed to raise standards. The Basic Skills Quality Initiative is part of that drive, adding an important dimension to quality improvement in further education. It has supported the development of a range of materials, designed to demonstrate good practice in the following areas of basic skills: *teaching, learning and students' achievements; guidance and support; curriculum organisation and management; quality assurance and staff development.* Attending to one or two elements in isolation is unlikely to bring about the scale of change required. A thorough understanding of the principles and processes underpinning each of these, and a cohesive approach to their application, lie at the heart of quality improvement.

Over 100 trained facilitators will help providers make effective use of the Basic Skills Quality Initiative materials, and will support them in addressing key issues. Providers will also have the opportunity to send a small group of staff to a training event to work together and with others in identifying effective ways to improve their provision.

While the materials are intended primarily for those concerned with basic skills, they are relevant to everyone working in further education. Whether we teach or manage provision in workshops, learning centres or classrooms, the materials provide an opportunity to remind ourselves of the vital processes of teaching and learning, and of the importance of effective structures and procedures to support them.

None of this would have been possible without the professional lead of Merillie Vaughan Huxley and the contribution of four consultants: Teresa Bergin, Pat Hood, Liz Lawson and Sheila Leevers. Thanks are also due to the Council's inspectors who guided and contributed to the work: Stuart McCoy, Carol Tennyson and William Lewis. Colleagues from the Council's Quality Improvement Unit – Emer Clarke, Mary Kelly, Kathryn O'Regan, Andrew Lambe, Gillian Blake and Claire Wood – provided support and expertise throughout. Jillian Peach designed the materials and Ray Oram provided technical advice.

Jim Donaldson

# Introduction

The Basic Skills Quality Initiative (BSQI) is a major programme of staff and organisational development which forms part of the FEFC's response to raising standards following inspection and to the report of the Moser group, *Improving Literacy and Numeracy: A fresh start.* The report highlighted the fact that 7 million adults in England have problems with literacy and numeracy. The Council has responded by providing funds from the further education Standards Fund to support the work of the BSQI.

The Standards Fund was introduced in 1999-2000 to underpin the drive to raise standards in the sector. In 1999-2000, it comprised £35 million rising to £80 million in the financial year 2000-01. In addition, on 30 March 2000, the secretary of state announced a further £18 million in 2000-01 to support colleges in their drive to improve the examination performance of full-time 16–18 year-old students. The government has confirmed its intention to extend the Standards Fund to 2001-02, and has currently allocated £160 million for this purpose.

The BSQI includes:

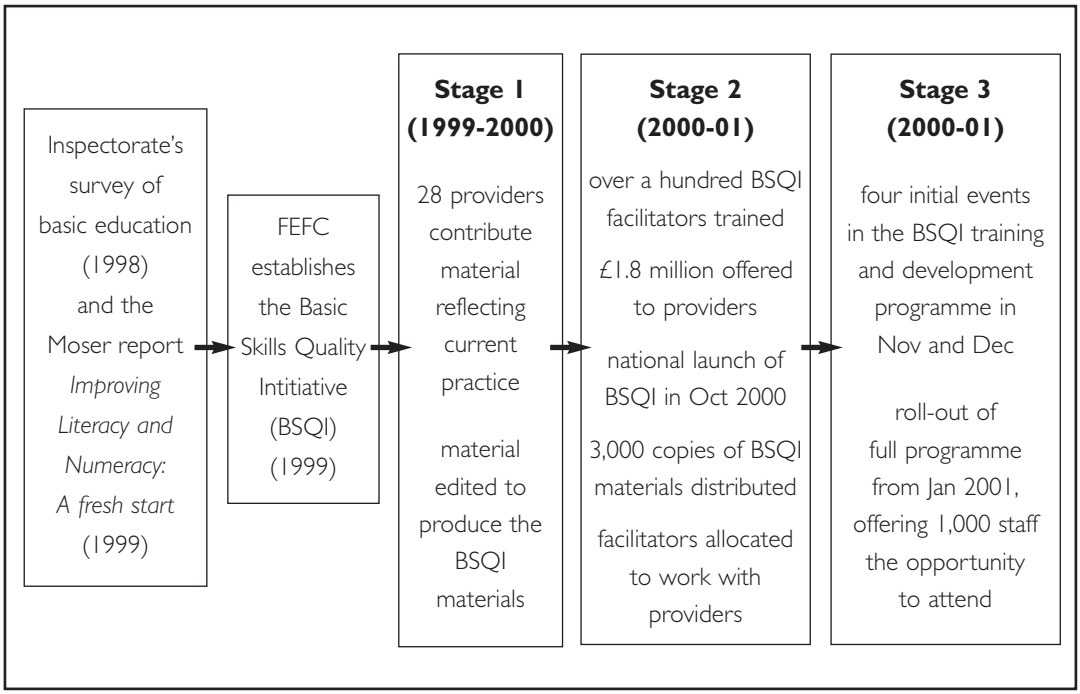
- a package of materials designed for use by managers and lead practitioners
- resources for providers to employ a trained basic skills facilitator
- the opportunity to attend a training and development event.

In 1999-2000, the Council committed £350,000 to the establishment of the initiative and the early stages of gathering the current practice material from providers. A further £3.5 million was subsequently allocated, including £1.8 million to provide individual funding for providers, and £1 million for the first phase of the training and development programme.

The intended outcomes of BSQI are:

- improvements in the standards and quality of basic skills provision
- improved experience for learners
- increase in the volume of learners participating in basic skills
- improvements in the retention and achievement rates for basic skills learners
- improvement in people's capacity to work and progress in education and employment.

# The Development of the BSQI




## Stage 1

### Collection and compilation of materials

During the financial year 1999-2000 the Council provided financial support for stage 1 of the initiative, which included the collection and compilation of materials. Providers were invited to contribute materials for the initiative, and 116 applications were received. Twenty-eight providers were selected, representing a range of types of provider, and participated in stage 1. The materials have been organised into four units, designed to help providers improve the quality of their basic skills work.

The units are divided into aspects and elements which focus on specific topics or features of basic skills provision. Principles of good practice and prompt questions are key features of each unit. The units are not intended to contain materials which can be extracted and used without some revision. Their prime purpose is to help providers think about the processes and issues they need to work through in order to raise the quality of their basic skills provision.

The four units are:

- Teaching, Learning and Students' Achievements
- Guidance and Support
- Curriculum Organisation and Management
- Quality Assurance and Staff Development.

## Stage 2

### Recruitment and training of basic skills facilitators

During the summer term 2000, the Council recruited more than 100 facilitators with specialist knowledge of basic skills. All facilitators have successfully completed a training programme designed to familiarise them with the materials and to help them support organisations in using the materials to improve the quality of their basic skills provision.

The Council has provided further financial support from the Standards Fund in 2000-01 to help providers make the most effective use of the materials. Stage 2 of the initiative involves the dissemination of the materials to providers, the deployment of facilitators and the allocation of a little under £2 million in funding. The funds will enable providers to pay for the time and expertise of their facilitator and to support the release of staff from their duties to work on achieving the aims of the initiative.

## Stage 3

### BSQI training and development programme

The Chief Inspector's Annual Report, *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000*, indicates that one of the most significant weaknesses in basic skills provision is the failure to co-ordinate it effectively. Basic skills provision often lacks coherence, strategic planning and leadership. There are deficiencies in the use of management information, targets and performance criteria. Few colleges prepared effective self-assessment reports on basic skills.

A further element of the BSQI will help providers address these areas in stage 3 of the initiative. This is a training and development programme which will provide the opportunity for between two and four members of staff to attend an event designed to help them identify the most effective means of improving the quality of their basic skills provision. The focus will be on strategic and operational management of basic skills in order to meet the shared purpose of raising standards by bringing about significant improvements in providers' capacity to develop and manage high-quality basic skills provision. Events will run over three days and will include:

- updates on the various national initiatives in basic skills
- information and guidance on the support available through the BSQI to support improvement programmes (that is, the use of facilitators and the BSQI materials)
- input on specific areas of difficulty in basic skills provision and on relevant good practice, as identified by the current round of inspections
- workshops helping providers to review their provision and develop strategies for bringing about improvements in specified areas
- time for providers to develop their own quality improvement programme, working in their own team and with others in their peer group.

The Council's target is for 1,000 members of staff to attend the training and development events, beginning with four initial events in November and December 2000.

# The Materials

The following sections describe the contents of the units and explain how providers can use the materials to improve the quality of their basic skills provision.

Basic Skills Quality Initiative

## The Units

The materials contributed by the providers who participated in stage 1 of the initiative have been collated into the four units listed below:

**Unit 1 Teaching, Learning and Students' Achievements**

*Aspect 1* *Initial assessment and starting points*
Element 1 Initial assessment
Element 2 Developing learning goals

*Aspect 2* *Teaching and Learning*
Element 1 Programme design
Element 2 Approaches to teaching and learning
Element 3 Learning resources

*Aspect 3* *Assessing learning and recording students' achievements*
Element 1 Assessing learning and recording progress
Element 2 Recognising achievement

**Unit 2 Guidance and Support**

*Aspect 1* *Support for learning basic skills*
Element 1 Structures, entitlement and access
Element 2 Types of learning support and measures for improvement
Element 3 Additional support for basic skills students

*Aspect 2* *Guidance and tutorials*
Element 1 Entry advice and induction arrangements
Element 2 Tutorials and guidance
Element 3 Progression

**Unit 3 Curriculum Organisation and Management**

*Aspect 1* *Curriculum organisation*
Element 1 The curriculum offer
Element 2 Reviewing and revising basic skills provision

*Aspect 2* *Curriculum management*
Element 1 Positioning basic skills in the organisation
Element 2 Planning and target setting
Element 3 Managing information and budgets

*Aspect 3* *Partnerships*
Element 1 Needs analysis
Element 2 Collaborative working
Element 3 Reaching the 'hard to reach'

*Aspect 4* *Managing learning resources*
Element 1 Learning resources
Element 2 Staffing
Element 3 Accommodation

**Unit 4 Quality Assurance and Staff Development**

*Aspect 1* *Quality assurance framework for basic skills*
Element 1 Structures and procedures
Element 2 Observing teaching and learning
Element 3 Collecting and using feedback from students
Element 4 Reviewing and evaluation provision

*Aspect 2* *Improving basic skills provision*
Element 1 Measuring performance
Element 2 Reporting on performance and action planning

*Aspect 3* *Staff appraisal and development*
Element 1 Staff appraisal and performance review
Element 2 Identifying training needs
Element 3 Implementing staff development

## Using the Materials

The purpose of the materials is to help organisations improve the quality of their basic skills provision. The materials are not designed to be used without revision. None of the materials represent complete documents, they are all samples and extracts. Organisations will derive the most benefit by using the materials to help them consider the processes and issues they need to work through in order to raise the quality of their basic skills provision.

It is not necessary to work through the units sequentially. A useful approach might be for providers to begin by reviewing and evaluating the quality of their basic skills provision across the college. This does not need to be an additional task: it is most effective when carried out as part of the organisation's quality assurance procedures, for example when producing a self-assessment report. The process of review and evaluation will highlight those aspects of the college's basic skills provision that need to be improved. Staff will then be able to select relevant materials from the units, compare their own practice with that described in the materials, and then adapt the materials to suit the needs of their own staff and students. The development of an action plan for improvement will provide a framework to help staff across the organisation understand what needs to be done, by whom and within what timescale. This will in turn help providers to monitor the effectiveness of the action they have taken.

## The Basic Skills Facilitator

It is expected that providers will be at varying stages in the development of a high-quality approach to basic skills. The facilitator allocated to each provider participating in the initiative will help staff confirm the stage they have reached. Facilitators will also be able to advise on developing an effective action plan in response to the initial review and evaluation activities, as well as giving general support and advice as providers work towards developing their capacity to develop and manage high-quality basic skills provision. Over £1.8 million has been distributed to providers on the basis of their student FTEs. Some flexibility in the use of funds has been built in to the initiative to enable providers either to release staff for work with their facilitator or to allow time for staff to meet together to work on achieving the objectives set out in their action plan. A minimum of 50% or £900, whichever is the greater, must be used to purchase facilitator time. Facilitators will be allocated as part of a rolling programme beginning in November 2000.

Facilitation will be guided by the six-stage process identified on page 10.

# The Six-Stage Process for Quality Improvement

**Stage 1: Initial Review**

***Making sure it is the 'big picture'***

establishing all the situations where basic skills is happening, looking at how it is managed, coordinated, structured, resourced, quality assured as well as aspects more directly concerned with the student: assessment, teaching and learning, achievement and student support; the strategic as well as the operational; thinking about what you should look at and the information needed to support the review

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**Stage 2: Analysing the Outcomes of Review**

***Looking critically at your basic skills work***

reviewing in order to identify and prioritise areas for improvement; deciding how effectively the provision is managed, how consistent the standards of delivery are, how good learners' achievements are, how effectively good practice is shared, how well community needs are being met – considering the strategic/management issues as well as the practitioner ones

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**Stage 3: Target Setting**

*(linked to Stage 4)*

setting realistic, achievable targets but ones that reflect improvements

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**Stage 4: Action Planning**

being clear about what has to be done and how it is going to be done – what actions are needed to deliver the improvements, what resources for each action, what timescales, who is going to take responsibility for the action, who will be involved in delivering it

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**Stage 5: Reviewing Progress**

maintaining focus on the action plan, identifying what evidence there is of progress, and where progress has not been made, exploring reasons why, perhaps modifying the plan or trying different strategies

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**Stage 6: Evaluation**

completing the loop – have the actions been accomplished?
have they delivered the improvements sought?
have students benefited – has there been a real increase in the number of learners and in their success? have the gains been embedded?
and what lessons can be learnt from the process – ready to move on to the next round of improvements

The materials will have the most impact in those organisations where senior managers are committed to the development of high-quality basic skills provision. Such quality can only be achieved by ensuring that organisational structures, systems and procedures support the development of provision, that the necessary resources are available and that staff are skilled in helping students to learn effectively. The Moser report, *Improving Literacy and Numeracy: A fresh start* sets significant challenges for the providers of basic skills programmes. The materials gathered as part of the BSQI, together with the work of the facilitators and the training for staff financed by the Council from the Standards Fund, will enable committed providers to rise to the challenge and help learners to make significant progress in their ability to read, write and use numbers confidently.

## The FEFC Website

The published materials are available also on the Council's website (www.fefc.ac.uk).

## Conclusion

The three stages of the BSQI: the production of the BSQI materials and the recruitment and training of facilitators; the provision of funds to individual providers to employ the facilitator; and the BSQI training and development programme, comprise a comprehensive and innovative package of support. Together they will enable providers to work individually on their own behalf to develop their capacity to deliver high-quality basic skills provision, to access the time and expertise of a basic skills specialist and to benefit from a residential training and development event focusing on the structure, resourcing and management of basic skills provision.

# BSQI Contributors and Working Group

The providers listed alphabetically below contributed original material, representing their current practice, to stage 1 of BSQI.

Barnsley College
Blackburn College
Brockenhurst College
Bury College
Cirencester College
De Montford University
Derby Tertiary College, Wilmorton
Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology
Havering College of Adult Education
Havering College of Further and Higher Education
Lewisham College
Liverpool Community College
Manchester Adult Education Service
New College Nottingham
Norfolk Adult Education Service
Northern College
Oaklands College
Park Lane College
Pennine Camphill Community
Royal Forest of Dean College
Sandwell College
Southgate College
Stroud College
Tameside College
Warwickshire College, Royal Leamington Spa and Moreton Morrell
Wigan and Leigh College
William Morris Camphill Community

## Basic Skills Quality Initiative Working Group

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