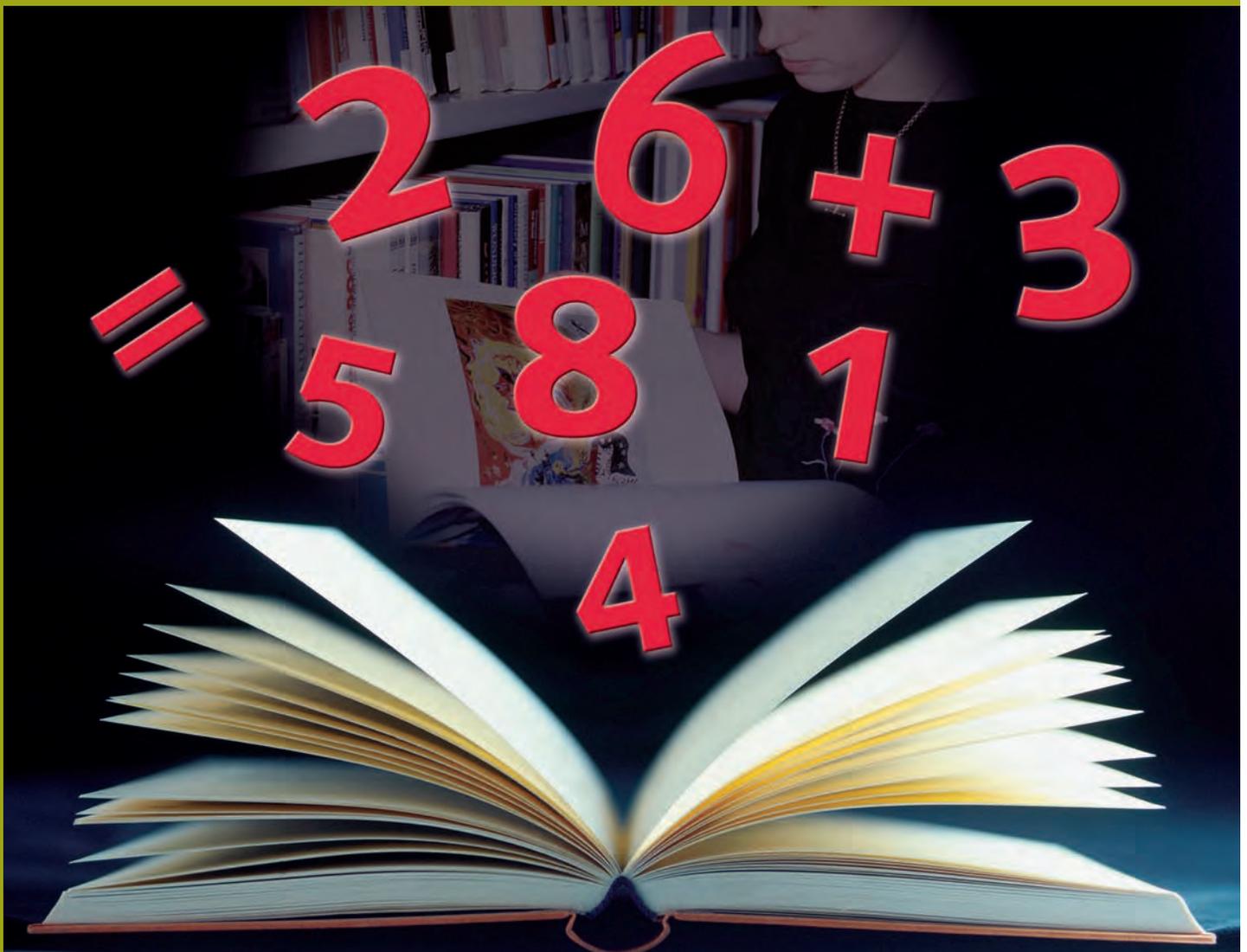




Words Talk, Numbers Count

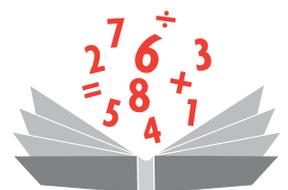
Post-16 Basic Skills PLASC Arrangements



Guidance

Welsh Assembly Government Circular No: 029/2007

Date of issue: 3 September 2007



Words Talk, Numbers Count

Audience	Heads of maintained secondary schools with designated sixth forms and special schools with designated post-16 provision; Directors of Education; Basic Skills officers or co-ordinators within LEA.
Overview	Screening and assessment arrangements in context of the Welsh Assembly Government's Strategy to improve literacy and numeracy standards in Wales, and the Pupil Level Annual Statistical Census (PLASC).
Action required	For administration during September in conjunction with materials being delivered separately.
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Related documents	National Assembly for Wales PLASC guidance on the Pupil Level Annual Schools' Census (PLASC) updated annually.

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1. Introduction

1.1 We wrote to schools on 4 July 2007 reminding them of their obligations to screen pupils and assess their basic skills at the beginning of their programmes of learning in Year 12. We said that further guidance, including how to access the appropriate tools to carry out the process, would be issued ready for the autumn term 2007. This circular expands on that letter and provides further guidance.

2. Strategic Context

2.1 We define basic skills as the ability to read, write and speak in English or Welsh, and to use mathematics at a level necessary to function and progress both in work and in society. In terms of qualifications, we define basic skills as Level 1 in the National Qualifications Framework. The focus of the basic skills strategy in Wales is, therefore, to improve literacy and numeracy at levels up to and including Level 1. **This is the national target and considered to be the 'functional' level.**

2.2 The first National Basic Skills Strategy for Wales was launched in 2001 by the then Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, Jane Davidson, in response to evidence that one in four of the adult population had poor basic skills which was impacting on productivity in the workplace and costing the Welsh economy dear. It was apparent that some children were leaving primary school without mastering basic skills, some young people were leaving compulsory education struggling with basic skills and that others retained difficulties into adulthood. Altogether a major problem that was holding back their development in so many ways.

2.3 Jane Davidson launched the second National Basic Skills Strategy for Wales. **"Words Talk, Numbers Count"** in April 2005 and ministerial commitment to the Strategy is being continued by the current Deputy Minister for Skills, John Griffiths. At the Basic Skills Wales annual conference in June 2007, he said:

"Clearly, early intervention is crucial to tackling the situation, combined with intervention at other key points in the learning process. Our unique, all-age approach to improving basic skills mirrors my own values of making education accessible to all no matter what their background or previous level of achievement."

2.4 Contracts to oversee delivery of both strategies on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government were awarded to the Basic Skills Agency (BSA).

3. Basic Skills Screening and Assessment Arrangements for Post 16 Providers

3.1 In its 2003 Remit Letter from the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG), ELWA was asked to "put in place effective arrangements for the pre-assessment of learners for which it provides support". As part of a strategic approach to tackling basic skills needs, ELWA issued guidance between 2003 and 2004 to providers of

post-16 learning including Further Education Institutions, school sixth forms, work-based learning providers and providers of Adult Community Learning.

3.2 Integral to the guidance was that screening of all learners for basic skills needs should be carried out, that support should be given to address any identified needs and that advice to the learner should be given on how their needs can be met.

4. Developments within the Welsh Assembly Government

4.1 The merger of ELWA into the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) in April 2006 means that WAG must absorb the responsibilities as outlined above and pick up on the guidance previously prepared by ELWA which is no longer current. In addition, the Basic Skills Agency in Wales was brought into WAG in July 2007. Now referred to as **Basic Skills Cymru**, the team is attached for the time being to the Skills, Business and Employability Division (SBE) within the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS). Whilst there are inevitable adjustments to make, the merger is expected to bring more coherence to delivery of the strategy.

5. “Words Talk Numbers Count” and PLASC

5.1 The requirement to include in PLASC, outcomes for those pupils identified as having basic skills needs at the beginning of their programmes of learning in the sixth form was introduced as part of the Education (Information About Individual Pupils) (Wales) Regulations 2003 as amended in 2005. The requirement to enter results for pupils screened at the end of their programmes of learning in the sixth form was introduced into the regulations as amended in 2006.

5.2 The quality of data provided as part of the PLASC collection in January 2007 together with feedback from schools and LEA support teams has highlighted the need for more detailed guidance. The SBE Division which oversees basic skills policy in Wales is working with the Information Management Strategy team, Basic Skills Cymru and statisticians to refine the process.

6. Why should New Entrants into the 6th Form be Screened or Assessed for Basic Skills Needs?

6.1 The requirements stem from one of the fundamental aims of the Strategy which is that:

“fewer young people should leave compulsory education still struggling with basic skills”.

6.2 It is assumed that schools, particularly those who have been awarded the Quality Mark, will wish to identify and support any pupils identified as having basic skills needs for the sake of the individual pupils as well as to boost overall performance. This means assisting those below Level 1 which is the national target for basic skills and regarded as the “functional” level.

6.3 The screening and assessment process is considered to be an integral part of delivering on this ministerial commitment. The arrangements will help to standardise good practice across the whole post -16 sector in Wales. FE colleges are required to assess all learners who begin courses of 5 hours or more and enter the results onto the Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR). They then arrange free support for those identified as having basic skills needs. Many colleges report that assessment is a valuable part of the FE process, enabling the provider to respond positively to the needs of learners. For schools, outcomes recorded on PLASC will feed into LLWR, thereby providing a complete picture across the post 16 sector.

7. The Arrangements for 2007- 08

New Entrants into the sixth form

7.1 Schools are currently asked to record “whether pupils have been screened to identify a basic skills need.” For those identified as such, “whether they have been further assessed” and if so, to enter the results in PLASC based on the levels outlined in Annex A to this circular.

Screening and assessment tools

7.2 It has not been possible to make available suitable on-line screening or assessment tools to schools, free of charge, for this year. Schools will therefore be supplied with materials being delivered separately by the Prolog distribution company as follows:

- 100 copies in English and Welsh of fast-track screening tools developed by the BSA. This test provides an indication of competence in both literacy and numeracy but does not allow for detailed levels to be recorded;
- User Guides
- A binder of materials containing English and Welsh versions of the Initial Assessment tools and marking schemes for literacy and numeracy developed by the BSA. These tools allow for more in - depth assessment to take place and for levels of achievement to be calculated.
- CD versions of the Initial Assessment tools will be distributed to schools in late September.

7.3 Since 100 copies of the fast track screening tools are being provided, the need for photocopying should be minimal. For the Initial Assessment tools, schools may use Version 1 or Version 2 of both the literacy and numeracy tools and will need to arrange for these to be photocopied.

7.4 Other, on-line, tools have been developed by commercial organisations and colleges. Schools may wish to purchase these and can do so provided that they are comparable assessments.

Screening and Assessment Options

7.5 Schools may choose:

Option 1 – arrange for fast-track screening of all new entrants into the sixth form, followed by Initial Assessment of those pupils judged to have basic skills needs. (In this case, because PLASC asks for an entry against each pupil to be recorded, “NA - not assessed since no basic skills identified through screening” will need to be entered for those judged as having no basic skills needs through the fast-track screening.)

or

Option 2 – if they prefer to carry out one procedure, arrange for Initial Assessment of all new entrants into the sixth form using either version 1 or version 2, which allow for accurate levels to be recorded against each pupil. This would be WAG’s recommended option.

When should the screening and/or assessments be carried out?

7.6 Whilst the screening and/or assessments can be carried out at any time during the autumn term, schools will, no doubt, wish to complete the process during the first half of the term in order to assist with planning and delivery.

Financial Support for 2007

7.7 We recognise that schools will need to arrange for copies to be produced of the Initial Assessment tools. They will also need to arrange for screening papers and assessments to be marked. **This is why for this year, WAG and Basic Skills Cymru will provide additional funding to support schools with the process. Schools may claim £10 per marked Initial Assessment (or comparable assessment tool) by completing the template at Annex B and submitting the claim to their LEA by the end of the autumn term. The fast track screening scripts are NOT eligible for this payment.**

7.8 During the autumn term, Basic Skills Cymru officers will be carrying out routine visits to some schools and LEAs and will assess how successful the arrangements have been.

Sixth form leavers

7.9 Previously, schools were asked to screen all leavers in Year 13. We recognise, however, that some pupils may leave within the first year of the sixth form. We also recognise that it is unnecessary to screen those pupils who were judged to be at Level 1 or above in literacy and/or numeracy on entry. **We therefore recommend that schools carry out an assessment only of those who were identified as having basic skills needs in Yr 12. For PLASC purposes the value 'NS - not screened should be entered for those pupils who were not identified as having basic skills needs in year 12.** At this stage, it is hoped that improved results will be noted as an indicator of how successful the planned interventions have been.

8. Embedded Basic Skills

8.1 From 2009, a new PLASC item will be introduced called “Embedded Basic Skills”. This item will record the type of support proposed for those pupils identified as having basic skills needs. It will ask whether support is planned for literacy skills only, for numeracy skills only, or for both. It will ask if the support will be “specific”, ie provided through a specific literacy or numeracy programme, or “other” support, ie embedded within other courses or learning programmes. Further guidance on this will be available next year.

9. Do Pupils with Good GCSE Results need to be Screened or Assessed?

9.1 The arrangements apply to all pupils, regardless of their GCSE results. Some FE Colleges report that when they carry out screening of new learners, even students with good GCSE results can demonstrate that they lack competence with basic skills. Feedback from employers also suggests that many job applicants with good GCSE results need to improve their basic skills.

9.2 Work is in hand to ensure that GCSE arrangements will address competence in basic skills but in the meantime, it is expected that schools will provide support for those learners with basic skills needs.

10. Arrangements from 2008

10.1 Basic Skills Cymru plan to commission a convenient on-line tool or tools to be made available to schools free of charge from autumn 2008 when further guidance will be issued. Other on-line tools are available which schools are free to purchase if they wish, provided the processes are comparable.

Annex A

The Adult National Standards Framework for Literacy and Numeracy

The national standards framework for literacy and numeracy defines skills at Entry level (divided into three sub-levels), Level 1 and Level 2 or above. Levels 1 and 2 are broadly comparable to GCSE English and Mathematics.

General descriptions of each level within the National Standards are given below.

Level	Literacy (reading)	Numeracy
Entry level 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands short texts with repeated language patterns on familiar topics • Can obtain information from common signs and symbols 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands information given by numbers and symbols in simple graphical, numerical and written material
Entry level 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands short straightforward texts on familiar topics • Can obtain information from short documents, familiar sources and signs and symbols 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands information given by numbers, symbols, simple diagrams and charts, graphical, numerical and written material
Entry level 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands short straightforward texts on familiar topics accurately and independently • Can obtain information from everyday sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands information given by numbers, symbols, diagrams and charts used for different purposes and in different ways in graphical, numerical and written material
Level 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands straightforward texts of varying length on a variety of topics accurately and independently • Can obtain information from different sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands straightforward mathematical information used for different purposes and can independently select relevant information from given graphical, numerical and written material
Level 2 or above	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands a range of texts of varying complexity accurately and independently • Can obtain information of varying length and detail from different sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands mathematical information used for different purposes and can independently select and compare relevant information from a variety of graphical, numerical and written material

Annex B

Claim Form to be returned to Basic Skills Officers or co-ordinators within LEAs by the end of the autumn term 2007.

“WORDS TALK, NUMBERS COUNT” and Post 16 Basic Skills PLASC arrangements.

Welsh Assembly Government Circular (WAGC) No: 29/2007

Relevant Section: Financial Support, paragraph 19.

Name of School	
Address of School	
Telephone No. of School	
e-mail address of School	
Name of Headteacher	
Name of LEA	
Address of LEA	
Number of entrants into the sixth form for September 2007	
Number of pupils who have completed the fast track basic skills paper or comparable paper (<i>NOT eligible for payments</i>)	
Number of pupils who have completed the Initial Assessment	
Funding claimed @ £10 per Initial Assessment or comparable assessment	

Authorised by:

Name:

Signature:

Position:

Date:

