5-key skills 24–01–2000 08–22pm Page 1

feda quality learning skills

GNVQ Support Programme

The revised GNVQ

Key Skills

Linda Glover

5-key skills 24–01–2000 08–22pm Page 2

Published by FEDA

Feedback should be sent to
FEDA publications, Citadel Place,
Tinworth Street, London SE11 5EH
Tel: 0207 840 5302/4 Fax: 0207 840 5401
e-mail: publications@feda.ac.uk

Registered with the Charity Commissioners

Editor: Jenny Rhys
Proofreader: Jeremy Pinel
Designer: Kevin Ashill

ISBN 1 85338 526 3

© 2000 FEDA

You are welcome to copy this document for internal use within your organisation. Otherwise, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means; electronic, electrical, chemical, optical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Contents

Foreword	1
Introduction	2
Section 1 – Working with the new key skills units	**3**
Key skills levels	3
Key skills structure	4
Section 2 – Managing key skills	**5**
Key skills policies – a checklist	5
Section 3 – Teaching and learning for key skills	**6**
Patterns of delivery	7
Time allocation	7
Teaching and learning key skills	7
Staffing	8
Vocational relevance	9
Preparing students for external assessments	9
Monitoring students' progress	9
Section 4 – Assessing key skills	**10**
Good practice for key skills assessment – a checklist	11
External assessment	11
Section 5 – Induction and initial assessment	**12**
Induction	12
Initial assessment	12
Section 6 – Staff development	**13**

5-key skills 24–01–2000 08–22pm Page 1

Foreword

The revised GNVQ is being introduced into schools and colleges from September 2000. It will introduce changes that were recommended by the Capey review of GNVQ assessment and also by Sir Ron Dearing's review of all post-16 qualifications. The changes are designed to achieve two major objectives. First, to ensure that all GNVQs are easier to implement in schools and colleges. Second, to ensure that the assessment of GNVQs is rigorous and consistent.

This pack is part of the support provided through FEDA's GNVQ Support Programme. It is one of five packs designed to help tutors and managers implement revised GNVQ courses:

- Managing the revised GNVQ
- Recruitment, induction and progression
- Teaching, learning and assignment writing
- Assessing the revised GNVQ
- Key skills within the revised GNVQ.

Each pack is divided into sections which are subdivided into a series of topics exploring the management implications of the revised GNVQ.

5-key skills 24–01–2000 08–22pm Page 2

Introduction

Key skills are the transferable, applied skills that are useful in all aspects of life. Their recognition and development enable students to be active and investigative learners. Experienced tutors comment that when there is an emphasis on key skills there is often an improvement in performance within students' main vocational programme. By improving the quality of support for key skills, tutors can provide opportunities for students at all levels of ability to achieve their potential and enhance progression into further education, training or employment.

This pack has been written to help teachers plan and deliver effective key skills teaching and learning programmes for their students. It is divided into six sections:

- Working with the new key skills units
- Managing key skills
- Teaching and learning for key skills
- Assessing key skills
- Induction and initial assessment
- Staff development.

5-key skills 24–01–2000 08–22pm Page 3

Section 1 – Working with the new key skills units

Two groups of the new key skills are available for delivery from September 2000 at levels 1–4. The first covers:

- communication
- application of number
- information technology.

From September 2000, these will form the new **key skills qualification**. The three units for the qualification do not have to be achieved at the same level, so the certificate will be 'profiled' to reflect both personal achievement and the needs of the vocational area the student has studied. GNVQs will state the suitable level of achievement for each of the three key skills. These three key skills are not graded and are assessed through both portfolio and external assessment.

The second group of wider key skills is also available from September 2000 at levels 1–4 and comprises units of:

- working with others
- improving own learning and performance
- problem solving.

These wider key skills are also not graded.

At level 5, there is a single key skills unit in personal skills development incorporating all the key skills.

Key skills levels

Key skills are at five levels that broadly relate to other qualifications at the same level in the national qualifications framework. The levels are differentiated by placing demands on students that require:

- increasingly complex techniques in undertaking activities
- increasing responsibility for deciding how to apply skills
- an increasing awareness of how different factors affect performance as tasks become more complex.

Table 1 – The four levels of the key skills qualification

Level 1 – Development of basic techniques and skills: 'Take part in discussions about straightforward subjects…'
Level 2 – Building on and extending skills which require greater responsibility: 'Help move discussions forward…'
Level 3 – Responding to the demands of complex activities and taking personal responsibility: 'Create opportunities for others to contribute to group discussions about complex subjects…'
Level 4 – Exercising greater autonomy and responsibility and demonstrating the ability to plan over time: 'Develop a strategy for using communication skills over an extended period'

Like the revised vocational units, the new key skills units have been written and presented in a simplified form with clear language which directly addresses the student. Each unit has an introduction explaining what key skills are and why they are important', followed by a brief explanation of some of the terms that students need to know, such as 'evidence', 'portfolio', 'straightforward', 'complex', 'extended documents' and 'substantial activity'.

5-key skills 24–01–2000 08–22pm Page 4

Key skills structure

Each key skills unit has three main parts:

Part A – What you need to know

This section sets out the underpinning skills or basic techniques that students need to learn and practise to feel confident about each skill area. This section can be used to:

- assess prior learning
- assess current capabilities
- identify learning needs.

Part B – What you must do

This section identifies what the student must do to demonstrate the application of skills, and identifies clearly the type of evidence required for each skill.

Part C – Guidance

This section suggests activities that could be used to develop and demonstrate the required skills. It also contains examples of evidence.

Opportunities to develop and demonstrate key skills are signposted in all revised GNVQ vocational unit specifications as well as in the revised A-levels. This helps to ensure that key skills are seen as integral to the curriculum even though they do not form part of the qualifications.

Who are the key skills specifications for?

The specifications have been written for students, so it makes sense for each to have his/her own copy. There is no need for teachers to edit or précis them because the language has been kept as simple as possible, although some explanation and clarification will inevitably be required. Having the units will help students to:

- get to grips with what they need to do to complete the units
- be actively involved in their own learning
- understand what they are expected to learn
- see what sorts of opportunities there are to develop their key skills
- know what evidence they have to produce for assessment.

Part A of the specifications defines the learning programme that students may have to follow. It is essential that teachers have access to results of initial assessment so that learning plans can be drawn up. Section 5, 'Induction and initial assessment' deals with this in more detail.

By looking carefully at Part A, teachers can plan teaching and learning activities that will enable students to acquire the knowledge they need both to produce a portfolio and to pass the external assessment component.

Part B defines the evidence students have to provide for assessment. Teachers need to plan carefully so that there are sufficient opportunities for evidence to be produced from their vocational programmes and assignments. Portfolios need to show evidence that everything in this section has been done.

Communication, application of number and information technology are subject to external testing which will corroborate the evidence in the portfolio (see Section 5). Students will need to be prepared for both the content and the process of external assessment.

The guidance in **Part C** provides examples of activities and evidence that teachers can use as a starting point for planning the assessment of key skills.

5-key skills 24–01–2000 08–22pm Page 5

Section 2 – Managing key skills

The management of key skills will need to take account of the wide availability of key skills outside GNVQ programmes. A whole-school/college approach is therefore essential to ensure that:

- the large number of students undertaking external assessment is manageable
- internal assessments are standardised across subjects and vocational areas
- resources are available when required
- expertise and experience are built on.

Schools and colleges are addressing management issues by:

- ensuring that coordination is at a senior level and all senior managers are committed to key skills
- developing key skills policies that apply to all students on all programmes
- setting up key skills planning and coordination groups with representation from all curriculum and support areas
- reviewing the role of the tutor
- undertaking staff skills audits
- undertaking staff development for all staff
- using staff development to increase staff confidence and competence in key skills
- reviewing the role and capability of learning resource centres
- setting up systems and procedures for key skills moderation and internal verification.

Key skills policies – a checklist

Long-term planning for key skills will be greatly enhanced if a policy for key skills can be agreed.

Table 2 – Features of a comprehensive key skills policy

☐ A definition of the range of key skills that fall within the scope of the policy
☐ The purpose of the policy
☐ How the policy will be monitored and when it will be reviewed
☐ Who will be responsible for the policy, its management and implementation
The policy will make statements about:
☐ who the policy applies to
☐ what the key skills entitlement is
☐ arrangements for initial assessment
☐ arrangements for additional support
☐ arrangements for external assessment
☐ procedures for accrediting prior learning and achievement
☐ how the key skills will be delivered
☐ arrangements for staff development
☐ roles and responsibilities of staff, managers and students
The policy will also outline structures and processes for internal verification across the whole school/college which may include:
☐ standardised documentation and recording systems
☐ roles and responsibilities for all involved at individual, team and organisational levels
☐ schedules for internal verification and moderation

○ **Also see – Managing**

5-key skills 24–01–2000 08–22pm Page 6

Section 3 – Teaching and learning for key skills

Careful planning is required to ensure success in key skills delivery. Teachers need to plan how key skills are integrated into the vocational units and how students develop, practise and apply their key skills.

Students need to be prepared for both components of assessment (portfolio and external test).

Portfolio evidence is work that students undertake during their course as part of vocational assignments and occasionally as a discrete key skills activity. It is assessed by teachers and subject to standards moderation to ensure that assessments are consistent and to the national standard.

Key skills portfolios are most effective when:

- students understand their role and importance
- they are begun early in the students' programmes
- students have ownership of them
- evidence is drawn from key skills within students' vocational areas.

The starting point for key skills programmes is the key skills specifications themselves and the key skills 'signposts' within the 'Essential information for teachers' section of each GNVQ specification unit. Teams that contain both vocational and key skills specialists are most effective in planning key skills programmes, especially where it is agreed that ownership of key skills is shared.

Vocational teachers may feel less competent in some aspects of key skills and more in others, depending upon their experience, training and self-confidence. Key skills specialists can help teams and individuals by:

- clarifying the key skills units and content
- participating at an early stage in the planning of assignments
- being advocates for key skills
- suggesting opportunities for key skills development
- devising appropriate resources for key skills development
- providing specialist teaching inputs and learning activities where appropriate
- leading on standards moderation.

Successful key skills programmes:

- are planned at the start of the year by teams that include specialist key skills staff
- have clearly defined roles and responsibilities for teaching, learning, assessment and students' portfolios
- are built around external assessment dates and other fixed points
- have carefully planned teaching, learning and assessment schedules
- are based on up-to-date information.

○ Also see – Teaching, learning and assignment writing

5-key skills 24–01–2000 08–22pm Page 7

Patterns of delivery

The design of key skills programmes varies according to:

- the delivery schedule of the vocational units
- the availability of staff who can develop the specific knowledge for key skills that the student must acquire
- external assessment and portfolio moderation schedules
- work experience dates during which some key skills may best be demonstrated
- how learner support is used
- the impact of key skills, being available to other students beyond those taking GNVQ.

Time allocation

Key skills are demanding for students, so teaching time and learning time need to be allocated for students to :

- acquire the specific knowledge that underpins key skills
- practise, develop confidence and competence in key skills
- prepare portfolios
- prepare for external assessments
- undertake external assessments.

Teaching and learning key skills

Students see key skills as more relevant if they are developed and applied within their main vocational programmes. They also respond more positively if the culture of the school or college values key skills as essential to learning.

Because key skills are applied skills, students also need to be engaged and active in developing and applying them.

There are broadly three models of key skills delivery. In some cases, all three may exist in one school or college.

Full integration: key skills teaching and learning are undertaken entirely within the vocational context, with perhaps only additional learning support being offered outside.

Partial integration: a 'mixed economy' of key skills delivery, with a substantial amount of key skills development occurring within the vocational programme, taught by both key skills specialists and vocational teachers. There is a wide range of practice within this definition.

Separation: the 'stand-alone' approach to key skills. Vocational teachers do not take any responsibility for key skills teaching or assessment. Key skills are taught in discrete provision.

Although most staff subscribe to the concept of integration it may be difficult to operate because of timetabling, resources, accommodation, course hours and staff skills. Stand-alone key skills development can:

- provide a manageable way of support through timetabled or drop-in sessions
- make specialist help widely available to large groups.

5-key skills 24–01–2000 08–22pm Page 8

However, stand-alone key skills also:

- may lead to vocational staff not exercising their responsibilities for developing key skills
- may not always reflect the vocational context, which may diminish the learning experience.

FEDA has developed the concept of a continuum of skills development, represented in Figure 1.

Staffing

The nature and level of staffing varies. Whatever model of key skills delivery is adopted, each member of the programme team needs to be positive about key skills and their place in the curriculum. Staff also need to understand:

- their contribution towards key skills
- the contribution of key skills specialists.

For many centres, staff development will be needed for a wide range of staff to accommodate the increase in students undertaking key skills.

Figure 1 – Teaching and learning in a continuum of skills development and application

What you need to know	▼	
Acquiring basic techniques	▶	With guidance/Teacher lead
What you need to know	▼	
Practise building skills	▶	Gaining confidence
What you must do	▼	
Demonstrating skills/assessing application of skills	▶	Independent learner

The continuum may be 'entered' at different stages by different individuals and can be applied to all the key skills, including the wider key skills.

5-key skills 24–01–2000 08–22pm Page 9

Vocational relevance

On vocational-related programmes like GNVQs, students' motivation and interest in key skills increase when the skills are located within the vocational area. Equally, when vocational staff value key skills, the students tend to as well.

Key skills can be given a vocational relevance by:

- school- or college-based activities involving organising events based on their vocational areas
- using external speakers as key skills role models
- planning work-related activities around key skills development and evidence collection
- linking with employers who value key skills
- using mentoring programmes
- investigating and using television and other learning materials that promote key skills in vocational settings.

Preparing students for external assessments

Staff preparing students for external assessment need to be aware that the key skills qualification is demanding in its own right and that students will need to be carefully prepared for both the content and the processes involved.

The assessment tests students' ability to apply their skills as well as their underpinning knowledge and understanding. Tests may last for up to one hour at levels 1 and 2, and up to one-and-a-half hours at levels 3 and above.

Monitoring students' progress

Effective systems and processes for monitoring student progress in key skills are crucial to ensure that students:

- are aware of the demands of key skills and their own responsibilities towards developing and evidencing them
- are aware of test and standards moderation dates.

It is possible, and likely, that students within a single group will be taking different key skills at different levels from their main vocational programme. Some may be accessing additional support in one or more key skills. Some may be working towards achievement at a higher level than their main programme. Monitoring can be done by a vocational tutor, a personal tutor, a key skills tutor or a key skills specialist. That person will need to:

- maintain records of student progress
- review student work and agree targets
- provide feedback on evidence presented for the portfolio
- play a pastoral role to ensure that the student is coping with the various forms of key skills development.

5-key skills 24–01–2000 08–22pm Page 10

Section 4 – Assessing key skills

Each key skills unit of communication, application of number and information technology will be assessed through portfolio and external test. Key skills are not graded. Vocational unit specifications contain two types of guidance on key skills.

- keys to attainment – where achievement of a particular key skills requirement is considered essential for achievement of a particular vocational requirement of the unit
- signposts – which indicate to teachers where opportunities may exist to develop and assess particular aspects of the key skills.

Portfolios of evidence demonstrate that students can apply the skills in a range of contexts, and the external test corroborates that evidence.

For the teacher in a school or college, assessment has two related aspects:

- formative assessment, which assists the student's development and progress
- summative assessment, which tests whether the student has reached a particular standard.

The September 2000 key skills call for a holistic approach towards the evidence that a student must produce, rather than a tick-box approach. For example, levels 2 and 3 of 'application of number' and level 3 'information technology' require the student to undertake a 'substantial activity'. Formative assessment has a key role in work of this sort.

For learners, effective assessment practice:

- helps identify what has been learned
- provides accurate, objective feedback
- identifies what still has to be learned
- enables learners to set realistic targets
- allows learners to take an active role in their own skill development
- enables learners to reach the required standard
- evaluates the learning process itself.

For teachers, effective assessment practice:

- confirms what the student has learned and what still needs to be learned
- forms a basis for discussion with the student and other staff concerned
- confirms that the required standard has been reached.

5-key skills 24–01–2000 08–22pm Page 11

Good practice for key skills assessment – a checklist

The timetable for assessment and verification is aligned to the external assessment schedule.

- Time is set aside to prepare students for external testing
- Vocational assignments ensure that key skills are developed and assessed throughout the programme
- Key skills verifiers are involved at an early stage of planning
- Roles and responsibilities for key skills assessment are clearly defined within teams
- There is a whole-school/college approach to assessing and internally verifying key skills
- There are mechanisms for ensuring that good practice is shared and disseminated
- Key skills assessment, verification and tracking are resourced.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for centres is to ensure that standards of key skills assessment are consistent across all programmes.

External assessment

This component is externally set and marked. Awarding bodies are responsible for the arrangements for external tests.

5-key skills 24–01–2000 08–22pm Page 12

Section 5 – Induction and initial assessment

Induction

For key skills to become accepted by students as an essential part of their curriculum and development, induction needs to be carefully planned. Students, and those they seek advice from, will want to know:

- what their key skills entitlement is
- what key skills and the key skills qualification are
- how the levels work
- how key skills are learned
- how they are assessed
- what they are worth.

Schools and colleges should:

- be explicit about students' key skills entitlement
- include activities in induction that emphasise key skills
- promote key skills at all times.

Where students are able to mix GNVQ and A/AS-level courses, teachers and managers will need to ensure that there is a consistent approach and attitude towards key skills within the induction period and throughout the students' stay.

Initial assessment

Effective initial assessment has the following characteristics:

- procedures ensure that students start working towards key skills at the appropriate level
- there is a clear policy on dealing with the results of screening tests
- initial assessment tools and processes take account of the demands of key skills
- additional support needs are identified at an early stage
- feedback on initial assessment is quickly fed back to students and associated staff
- account is taken of the linguistic competence demanded by GNVQ programmes
- individual learning styles are taken into account.

Initial assessment methods may take a variety of forms:

- interviews
- student records
- degrees of formal testing

Testing may include screening for basic skills, 'work sample' – type assessments of current levels of attainment and diagnostic testing. Diagnostic testing is usually only used where other information is not sufficient. Essentially forward-looking, it uses formalised tests to identify an individual's potential, capability or potential to succeed.

○ **Also see – Assessing**

5-key skills 24–01–2000 08–22pm Page 13

Section 6 – Staff development

Effective delivery of key skills across the whole school or college requires a planned approach to staff development as staff need:

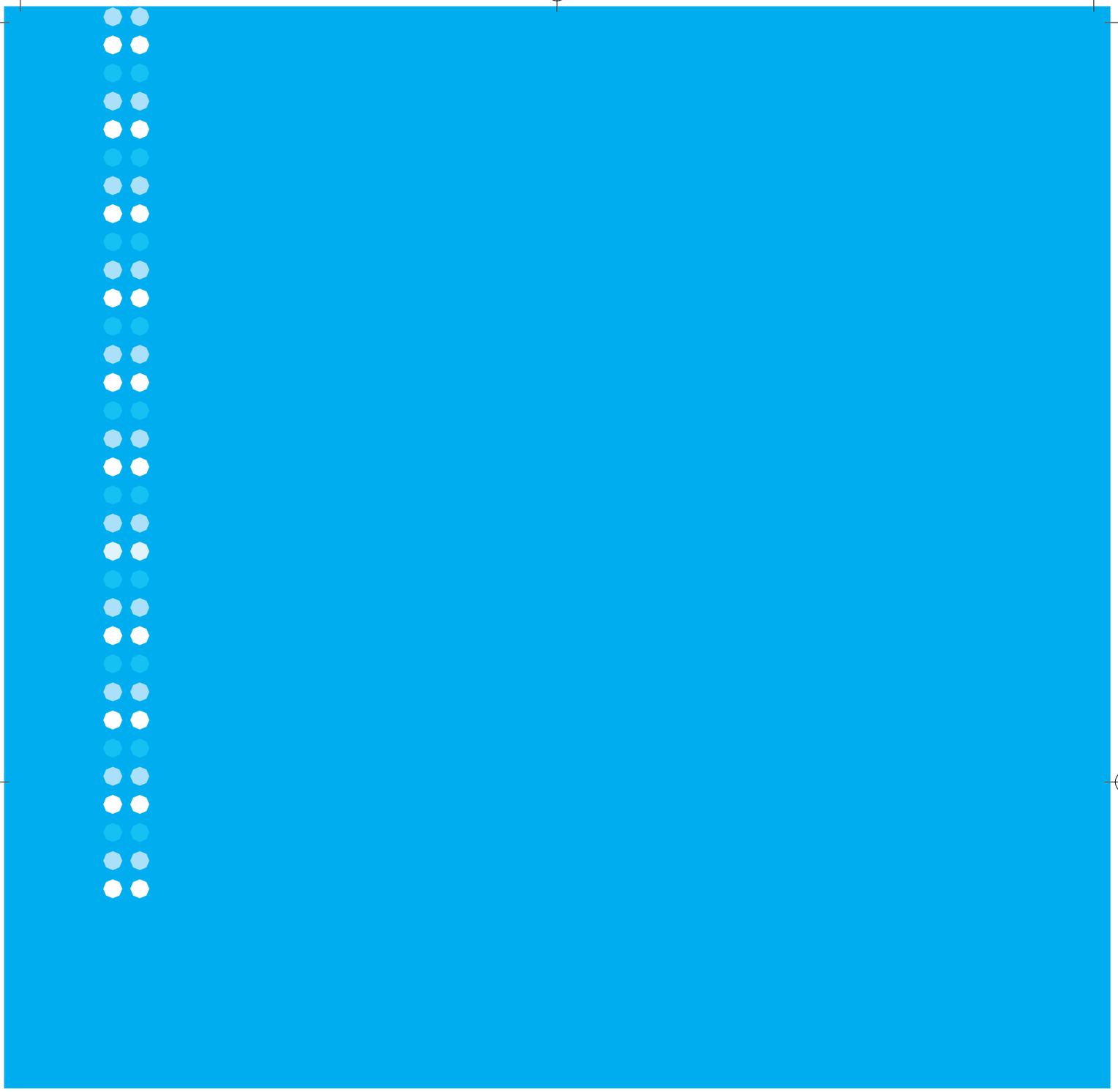
- information and updating
- support with models and approaches
- support with appropriate teaching and learning strategies
- support with assessment.

The following approaches have proved effective:

- team-based staff development
- involving all staff, whether they contribute directly or indirectly to key skills delivery and assessment
- training all teaching staff to take responsibility for some aspect of key skills
- team teaching involving key skills specialists and vocational teachers
- training to improve the confidence of staff with key skills
- training to improve levels of competence in key skills.

○ **Also see – Managing**

5-key skills 24–01–2000 08–22pm Page 14



ISBN 1 85338 526 3