

Increasing provision in English and mathematics through strategic planning

Four good practice case studies of further education and skills providers offering 16–19 study programmes

The 16 to 19 study programmes for all young people of this age group, apart from apprentices, require that all students without a GCSE at grade C or above in English and/or mathematics should continue to study these subjects. This has been a condition of funding for each of these students since September 2014.

Most providers have, therefore, had to cater for a considerable increase in the number of students requiring provision in English and mathematics.

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Introduction

These case studies describe how four general further education colleges tackled this issue through thorough strategic planning. They have adopted very different, but successful, approaches to building their staff capacity and creating a culture where all staff are motivated to support their students and all students are keen to develop their skills in English and mathematics.

Harlow College

URN: 130676

Harlow College is a medium-sized tertiary college located on a single site close to Harlow town centre, North West Essex. In 2013/14, approximately 200 students were working towards qualifications in English and mathematics, which increased to over 1500 enrolments for qualifications, in 2014/15.

The good practice in detail

“Starting from a very small provision for this area and having to move very quickly to providing English and maths qualifications for 1500 learners, we have been delighted with the positive response from our vocational staff on becoming English and maths teachers. With over 35 staff now teaching GCSE and many more delivering functional skills within their vocational teams, the commitment of such a large number of staff across the college has made a great impact on the support our students feel we give to these subjects. Deciding to enrol all grade D students onto GCSE one year before it

was a requirement was a bold step but the enthusiasm with which our vocational staff have thrown themselves into ‘The Merchant of Venice’ and the complexities of probability has been palpable and our strategy to make English and maths an integral part of the study programme is well on its way.”

Louise Turner, Vice Principal

Capacity building and delivery model

To meet the increased demand for GCSE teachers, the senior leadership team focused on [developing the skills of current vocational teachers](#) instead of recruiting new GCSE teachers. As a result of this move:

- [English and mathematics towards GCSE](#) and the functional skills qualifications are taught by vocational tutors also teaching their main subject
- at least one vocational teacher in each vocational area now teaches GCSE English or mathematics embedding it in their own subjects
- staff who volunteered to do this followed the specialist enhancement training courses in mathematics¹ or English²

¹ Developed by the National Centre of Excellence for Teaching Mathematics; www.ncetm.org.uk/

² Developed by the Education Training Foundation; www.et-foundation.co.uk/

- a senior manager for English and mathematics led the initiative, with one GCSE specialist for each subject
- these GCSE specialists support the teaching staff on a weekly basis, going through their planned lessons, reinforcing the teaching skills needed and tackling queries from previous lessons
- each academy is responsible for their own [timetabling](#). Staff can use different models to suit the students and the courses. English and mathematics courses take place at different times of the day, including in twilight sessions
- additional learning support practitioners are allocated to specific vocational areas.

'We know what our students can do in English and maths and what they need to do for the GCSE or functional skills, so we can always reinforce their skills in different contexts during the vocational sessions too. This way, we are continually embedding English and mathematics into the vocational areas. We twist and mould the teaching.'

Vocational tutor

Making a difference – messages from teachers and students

The teachers highlighted some key aspects that have made the provision in English and mathematics more effective.

- It's easier to teach angles, shapes, area and ratio as they relate to a trade.

- We've managed to bridge the gap for the students by making English and mathematics purposeful.
- By involving employers to help identify what communication skills are needed, the students understand why they need to be confident in asking such as open-ended questions when speaking to clients.
- The senior management team is also involved in the teaching, this sets us all examples and emphasises the importance.
- We've come out of our comfort zone by having to learn how to teach GCSE, so we now need to help our students come out of theirs.



- You now hear students having discussions about the 'Merchant of Venice' in the corridors.
- The weekly support from the specialists is the key to success.

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The students said why they felt they were improving their skills in English and mathematics:

- The teachers accept that you will struggle and they work with you, stressing the importance of getting it right. They do more than just teach.
- You know you can't give up – there's always someone on hand to help you work out a different way.

- English and mathematics are more engaging because they are part of your course, even Shakespeare.

South Leicestershire College

URN: 130750

[South Leicestershire College](#) is a medium-sized general further education college that serves the south of Leicester and the Harborough district. The college operates from a modern purpose-built site located in South Wigston.

The college recognised that its success rates for GCSE and functional skills were low and that the quality of teaching and learning in English and mathematics was far too varied.

The good practice in detail

'Our priorities were to develop learners' confidence and skills in English and maths by improving the quality of teaching. We have, therefore, taken a whole-college approach to raise the profile and awareness of these subjects among all staff and students. We have increased the focus on English and maths for students at induction and introduced a new branding, 'I love English and Maths at South Leicestershire College', on badges and documents. Our current priority is to continue to develop teaching and learning in English and maths in vocational areas.'

Laurel Penrose, Deputy Principal & Chief Executive

Capacity building and delivery model

'Teachers successfully promote the improvement of students' English and mathematics skills, which has increased the success rates for functional skills and the proportion of students achieving grade A* to C GCSE has dramatically improved since the previous inspection.'

Inspection report, November 2014

English and mathematics are now a priority for each teaching team and the college has also developed a strong cross-college team ethos for English and mathematics.

English and mathematics specialists have one staff room, so that staff share ideas, materials and teaching strategies.

- All specialist English and mathematics staff are given relevant training to ensure that they are up to date with the skills and the requirements for the qualifications.
- Senior managers have raised the quality of teaching by using observation of learning sessions, including those carried out by peers, to highlight and share good practice.
- Three hours a week, discrete courses in English and mathematics are prioritised in the timetable.
- Personal tutors, known as 'progress coaches' monitor students' attendance and progress in English and mathematics.

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- Specialist staff run a drop-in learning centre for students that includes events and competitions or puzzles.
- Staff from vocational areas map their schemes of work to link with English and mathematics.

'Teachers promote the importance of high standards of English and mathematics well to all students, particularly how these will improve future employment prospects. For example, in business administration, teachers successfully develop students' mathematics skills and reinforce the application of these skills in the workplace through activities such as calculating cash-flow forecasts and comparing profit and breakeven outcomes.'

Inspection report, November 2014

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Making a difference – messages from students

The teachers highlighted some of the key aspects that have helped students develop their skills in English and mathematics.

These include:

- teachers' support to make sure that students don't lag behind
- teaching that ensures that students understand the topics to be able to carry out tasks independently later
- training on how to perform well in an exam, such as working out the timing, reading the question properly, and laying out the answer.

West Herts College

URN: 130720

[West Herts College](#) is a large general further education college and is one of four colleges in the county of Hertfordshire. It has three main campuses: one in Watford, one in Hemel Hempstead and one in Kings Langley. In 2014/15, they offered GCSE in English and mathematics for the first time.

The good practice in detail

'When we launched our strategy and new approach to delivering English and maths to students, we knew that we had to raise the profile of English and maths across the

college through a consistent message. The principal set a context that clearly showed the college's commitment to this aspect of work and the expectations that the college would deliver high quality English and maths provision to all students. We knew that we needed to change the culture.

The principal's presentation explained that a 'whole-college' approach would be adopted to English and Maths – through its people, environments, and resources. The principal's message enabled all subsequent work to remain firmly within agreed expectations. This was a key factor in the implementation of the strategy.'

Cath Gunn, Deputy Principal

Capacity building and delivery model

The guiding principles in the college's 2013–16 strategy for English and mathematics focused on: inspiring students to develop further their competence in English and mathematics; providing a workforce that is equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge needed to support students to achieve relevant qualification outcomes; embedding these subjects into all vocational qualifications; and ensuring that appropriate investment is made to provide the resources needed to achieve the college's vision, aims and objectives relating to English and mathematics.

In launching its new brand GEM (Good at English and maths), the first step was to recruit GEM specialists. Senior leaders decided to involve existing teachers instead of trying to recruit externally.

- They developed a team of 12 English and 12 mathematics specialists, including functional skills and some part-time teachers, to increase the flexibility in the provision offered.

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- The recruitment involved high standards and focused on selecting teachers that delivered consistent outstanding teaching and learning and were highly effective at engaging with students. They were awarded with an enhancement in pay.

English and mathematics are made so much more purposeful as they are related to our subjects. The teachers also link with employers to bring in requirements of the relevant industries and what employers are looking for.

- Training developed involved the National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics and the Education and Training Foundation enhancement courses, with input from the college and the adult basic skills teams.
- The GEM specialists have developed schemes of work for the GCSE and functional skills qualifications.

- They have also supported staff to develop lesson plans that show how English and mathematics can be integrated into the vocational lessons.
- Students attend discrete English and mathematics lessons once a week, in mixed vocational areas. The skills developed are reinforced through:
 - vocational training sessions mapped to English and mathematics skills
 - short drop-in booster sessions in GEM rooms across the college
 - posters around the college with word searches, vocabulary lists and mathematical formulae.
- Weekly tutorial, progress and assessment sessions now include setting and monitoring specific targets in English and mathematics for each student.

Making a difference – messages from the students

The students highlighted some of the key aspects that have enabled them to improve their skills in English and mathematics.

- There is no stigma about low levels of skills here. We're even happy to look at one another's work and do peer assessments.
- The diagnostic assessments mean that the teachers make sure you build on what you need to know.

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- You see English and mathematics from every angle. They mean something, as they are linked to our main courses.
- This is a different way of teaching – we’re not just learning to pass the test.
- The literature element of English is broken down – i.e. short stories instead of books – which have been selected with us in mind.
- The posters on the walls and drop-in booster sessions are really helpful.
- The target setting and reviews during tutorials are individualised so that they are relevant to our

careers as well as to our courses and the qualifications we need.

- English and maths are so much more palatable as they are based on practical skills instead of a text book that the teacher chose. It’s easier to be motivated to work hard.

Weston College

URN: 130720

[Weston College](#) is a large general further education college based in Weston-super-Mare in Somerset. The college has three campuses in the town and works with a large number of partner organisations to provide education and training across the south-west region. The number of students aged 16 to 18 on courses in English and mathematics increased from 847 in 2013/14 to 2,374 in 2014/15.

The good practice in detail

The college recognised that the success of any strategy relied on raising the profile and importance of maths and English throughout the organisation. A [three-year strategy](#) was devised that focused on increasing the capacity to deliver high quality maths and English skills, both, in discrete classes and embedded throughout vocational learning sessions. A cross-college, specialist maths and English development team was established that is responsible for delivering maths and English qualifications and leading an advancement programme designed to upskill vocational teachers, trainers and assessors.

“The challenge posed by the condition of funding meant that maths and English could no longer be a marginal player within curriculum provision. It had to be embraced and promoted throughout the college. The college had to make it ‘everyone’s responsibility’. Learners needed to see that maths and English are ‘high profile’ and central to their study programme here at the college. We had to ensure that maths and English lessons were of high quality and connected to their vocational learning.”

Dr Paul Phillips, Principal and Chief Executive

Capacity building and delivery model

Fundamental to the [strategy](#) was implementing an infrastructure that could effectively manage, coordinate and deliver maths and English across the college. This involved appointing a college lead for maths and one for English. Once in place, an implementation group, led by the Senior Vice Principal, was established.

The implementation group was made up of key stakeholders including heads of faculty, and members from: examinations; IT; management information; and support staff. This group is responsible for ensuring that the principles of the strategy and the key approaches are implemented in full.

Some of the key approaches adopted included:

- establishing a maths and English development unit from the former Skills for Life team that was independent of any faculty

- appointing a lead for maths and one for English who reported directly to the Senior Vice Principal
- developing a common timetable around which all other curriculum provision was built
- implementing an internal and external maths and English marketing strategy to raise the profile and promote the importance of these subjects in the eyes of students, staff, parents and employers (included student interviews, welcome days, induction, school liaison events etc.)
- setting up an automatic enrolment process to English and maths classes; diagnostic assessments completed as part of enrolment process
- electronic tracking and central reporting of a student’s prior attainment, initial and diagnostic assessment, attendance, progress, exams and achievement
- amending appraisal targets for all academic staff to include performance measures linked with students’ performance in maths and English and personal development.

‘Our emphasis is not just on encouraging students through qualifications, it is about supporting the curriculum areas to better enable the teaching of English and maths, and about upskilling staff to really deliver these subjects. An unintended consequence of our maths and English advancement programme for teachers has been a recognition that achieving and delivering these skills is hard. Learner perception is often that they will get ‘more of the same’ when

they continue to study maths or English. Staff training and development must foster different approaches to the delivery of these subjects’.

Dave Trounce, Senior Vice Principal

The key to success

Some of the key aspects that have underpinned the development of English and maths at the college include:

- establishing a level 3 ‘Preparing to teach maths or English advancement’ programme for vocational teachers
- an in-service mandatory training programme designed to develop skills around the embedding and delivery of maths and English
- developing an academic graduate internship programme to develop teachers in priority areas such as English, maths and science
- creating fractional posts to attract experienced specialists likely to be looking for part-time work e.g. teachers with young families looking to return to some level of teaching
- upskilling of Skills for Life teachers through GCSE enhancement programmes that are run by the National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics and the Education Training Foundation introducing a common marking scheme for correcting and developing English.

Learners needed to see that maths and English are ‘high profile’ and central to their study programme here at the college.

We had to ensure that maths and English lessons were of high quality and connected to their vocational learning.