

Post-16 Basic Skills Provision

Basic Skills Initial Assessment, Support and Monitoring Systems



Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales



BUDDSODDWR MEWN POBL.
INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

The purpose of Estyn is to inspect quality and standards in education and training in Wales. Estyn is responsible for inspecting:

- ▲ nursery schools and settings that are maintained by, or receive funding from, local education authorities (LEAs);
- ▲ primary schools;
- ▲ secondary schools;
- ▲ special schools;
- ▲ pupil referral units;
- ▲ independent schools;
- ▲ further education;
- ▲ adult community-based learning;
- ▲ youth support services;
- ▲ LEAs;
- ▲ teacher education and training;
- ▲ work-based learning;
- ▲ careers companies; and
- ▲ the education, guidance and training elements of Jobcentre plus.

Estyn also:

- ▲ provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales and others; and
- ▲ makes public good practice based on inspection evidence.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court

Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gsi.gov.uk

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website: www.estyn.gov.uk

© Crown Copyright 2006: This report may be re-used free of charge in any format or medium provided that it is re-used accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the document/publication specified.

Contents	Page
Introduction	1
The purpose and scope of the report	1
Background	2
Main findings	5
Implementation and effectiveness of initial assessment	5
Support for learners and the development of monitoring systems	6
Recommendations	8
An evaluation of the implementation and effectiveness of initial assessment	10
Further education colleges	10
Work-based learning providers	11
School sixth forms	12
CCET plans to use a common initial assessment tool for all post-16 providers	13
An evaluation of support for learners and the development of monitoring systems	14
Further education colleges	14
Work-based learning providers	17
School sixth forms	18
Adult community-based learning delivered by a local education authority	20
Appendix 1: Comparison of results of initial assessment using two different tools	
Appendix 2: Summary of initial assessment results (of providers visited)	
Appendix 3: Literacy and numeracy needs by learning area (of providers visited)	

Introduction

The purpose and scope of the report

- 1 The purpose of this report is to evaluate:
 - the implementation and effectiveness of basic skills initial assessment carried out by post-16 education and training providers; and
 - the support and monitoring systems that are put in place for those identified as needing to improve their skills.
- 2 The Welsh Assembly Government asked Estyn to:
 - describe the arrangements made by providers to initially assess their learners for basic skills needs;
 - identify what factors determine different approaches to initial assessment;
 - comment on the effectiveness of these arrangements in accurately identifying the scale of need and in using initial assessment results to organise basic skills support for individuals and at organisational level;
 - examine how well basic skills support and monitoring systems help learners to achieve their full potential; and
 - highlight good and innovative practice in order that this can be shared.
- 3 Inspectors interviewed managers in sixteen post-16 providers in Wales between September and December 2005. They asked questions about each provider's initial assessment process and the number of learners identified with basic skills needs.
- 4 Providers visited were:
 - 4 further education colleges;
 - 8 work-based learning providers;
 - 3 school sixth forms; and
 - 1 local authority provider of adult community-based learning.
- 5 Most learners in adult community-based learning are exempt from initial assessment because they learn for under five hours a week (see summary of guidelines on page 2) so inspectors visited only one provider.
- 6 Inspectors made return visits in May and June 2006 and interviewed learners, practitioners and managers. They gathered further evidence about the initial

assessment process, the support given to learners and the impact this support had on learners. Inspectors focused return visits on a sample of providers across the sectors.

- 7 The follow up visits were made to:
- 3 further education colleges;
 - 5 work-based learning providers;
 - 2 school sixth forms; and
 - 1 local authority provider of adult community-based learning.
- 8 The report also uses information from providers' documents and statistics relating to their procedures for initial assessment.

Background

- 9 In June 2004 ELWa¹, at the request of the Welsh Assembly Government, issued 'Basic Skills Screening and Assessment – Guidance to Learning Providers', www.learning.wales.gov.uk. This outlines a minimum requirement for providers to screen all learners on courses of over 5 hours a week from September 2004. This guidance sets out the arrangements that providers must make to identify learners who need basic skills support.
- 10 In July 2005, ELWa issued a further document 'Basic Skills Policy and Screening and Assessment Guidance for Learning Providers', www.learning.wales.gov.uk. This requires providers to assess the basic skills needs of all learners on entry to all ELWa funded provision of 5 hours or more per week. Providers are not required to assess learners on courses which do not lead to an accredited qualification or learners undertaking courses in pursuit of leisure or a hobby. Screening gives an indication of need but initial assessment indicates a need and identifies each learner's level of skills related to national curriculum levels. The document also states that 'where assessment has identified a need for basic skills support, it is incumbent upon providers to meet, or provide the opportunity for the learner to meet those needs'.
- 11 The Welsh Assembly Government launched its Strategy to Improve Basic Literacy and Numeracy in Wales 'Words Talk – Numbers Count' in April 2005. The Strategy, www.basic-skills-wales.org also emphasises the importance of identifying learners' basic skills needs and improving support for learners with those needs.

¹ ELWa was a former Assembly Sponsored Public Body whose functions were transferred to the National Assembly for Wales with effect from 1 April 2006.

- 12 Two themes of the Strategy are:
- a better identification of learning needs and tracking the progress of learners; and
 - better help and support for learners.
- 13 One of the objectives in the Strategy is to improve the effectiveness of embedded basic skills support for post-16 learners. A measure of providers' performance is the numbers of learners receiving support and the percentage of these successfully completing their main qualification aim.
- 14 In addition, one of the six priorities for change in the Welsh Assembly Government's 'Annual Learning and Skills Assessment' (May 2006) www.learning.wales.gov.uk is "Increased provision and support for those requiring basic skills training".
- 15 Throughout this report, where the term **basic skills** is used, it refers to:
- literacy;
 - numeracy; and
 - English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).
- 16 Where the term **learning support** is used, it refers to the basic skills support offered to learners who are following other vocational or academic programmes.
- 17 The term **screening** refers to processes used to identify whether or not a learner might have a basic skills need. **Initial assessment** indicates a learner's level of skills in literacy and numeracy. These levels match the Adult Literacy and Adult Numeracy core curriculum levels² to identify if a learner has a basic skills need. A provider can use a **diagnostic assessment** once a learner is identified with a basic skills need, to identify strengths and areas for development in basic skills in more depth. The Welsh Assembly Government's Strategy defines a **basic skills need** as those learners who have skills below Level 1 in literacy or numeracy. They do not have functional basic skills in literacy and numeracy.
- 18 Most post-16 providers use one of two initial assessment tools:
- the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) Initial Assessment; and
 - the West Nottinghamshire College 'basic & keySKILLBUILDER'(BKSB) Initial Assessment.
- 19 Providers can administer these assessments online. Learners have a set time of 40 minutes to complete the BSA literacy and numeracy assessments. Providers allow approximately 75 minutes for learners to complete the BKSB initial assessments.

² 'The Adult Literacy and Numeracy core curriculum' (Department for Education and Skills DfES 2001)

Post-16 Basic Skills Provision
Basic Skills Initial Assessment, Support and Monitoring Systems

- 20 Both these assessment tools provide levels referenced to the Adult Literacy and Numeracy core curriculum but they assess up to different levels. The BSA assessment identifies skills up to and including Level 1. The BKSB identifies skills up to and including Level 3.
- 21 The majority of providers visited hold the BSA Quality Mark. The few providers who sub-contract to deliver basic skills do so to providers who hold the Quality Mark. The schools visited hold the Quality Mark for Secondary schools. A very few providers do not know about the Quality Mark.

Main findings

- 22 The ELWa guidelines on initial assessment and support are effective in raising the profile of basic skills support. Providers are now aware of the need to make appropriate support arrangements for learners identified with basic skills needs. The majority of providers are providing support but there is too much variation in its quality and in the systems in place to measure its effectiveness.

Implementation and effectiveness of initial assessment

- 23 Most providers undertake initial assessment rather than screening with all learners. A very few providers still screen learners and do not go on to give them an initial assessment. When this happens, it prevents providers from identifying the level of learners' basic skills. Providers assess many more learners as a result of the guidance.
- 24 Most providers use one of two assessment tools. A few providers find one initial assessment tool identifies a greater level of basic skills need than the other. This makes it difficult to compare the percentage of learners identified with need in different providers.
- 25 In an example of good practice, Flintshire Community Consortia for Education and Training (CCET) is exploring the use of a common initial assessment tool across all post-16 providers. This aims to help providers share learners' initial assessment information.
- 26 A minority of colleges are introducing the good practice of giving learners an initial assessment at interview. This helps the colleges to place them on a course appropriate to the level of their skills.
- 27 Initial assessments are most effective where providers train their staff to carry out assessments and share the findings with the learners. In these cases learners have a positive experience and a clear idea of how they need to improve.
- 28 There is too much variation in the way providers use the information they gain as a result of initial assessments. Colleges have developed systems to analyse initial assessment data and pass information to support staff and vocational tutors for learners who need support. Schools are beginning to put these systems in place. In a minority of work-based learning providers, systems are at a very early stage of development.
- 29 Initial assessment results show a considerably higher percentage of learners needing support in literacy in work-based learning than in colleges. Numeracy needs identified are high but more similar in the two sectors. In school sixth forms, the percentage of learners identified with literacy and numeracy needs is low.
- 30 The range of basic skills needs across learning areas is variable in both colleges and work-based learning. There are similarities between the sectors in those learning areas which have high percentages of learners with literacy and numeracy needs.

- 31 There are an increasing number of learners for whom English is their second language. Many providers use inappropriate initial assessment tools for the needs of these learners.

Support for learners and the development of monitoring systems

- 32 Providers use a variety of strategies to support learners with basic skills needs.

These include:

- one-to-one/small group specialist support;
 - ‘on course’ support within the main qualification/vocational routes;
 - basic skills support delivered with key skills; and
 - use of additional ICT support such as Learndirect and BBC Skillswise.
- 33 The range of support strategies offered to learners is widest in colleges and in a minority of work-based learning providers. Most providers who offer one-to-one support find it has a high impact on a learner’s improvement in basic skills. However many learners are reluctant to access one-to-one support. In response to this, colleges have increased their ‘on course’ support, for example by qualified basic skills tutors working alongside mainstream staff. This is an effective way to reach the greatest number of learners with basic skills needs.
- 34 A minority of providers make good use of on-line programmes and resources such as Learndirect and BBC Skillswise, to supplement support and make it more flexible. However, there is a lack of material to develop learners’ basic skills in the context of their vocational courses.
- 35 As a result of the introduction of the guidelines, providers now assess an increased number of learners. For a minority of learners this results in a delay in the provision of support. The processing and analysing of the results, giving feedback to learners and timetabling support all contribute to this delay.
- 36 There is a lack of consistency in funding between types of providers to support learners identified with basic skills needs. Basic skills support for these learners is not a condition of funding for all providers. In particular, work-based learning providers are unclear how they are funded to provide the support. This contributes to inequalities in the type and quality of support for learners in the different sectors.
- 37 There are similarities between those learning areas identified with high levels of basic skills needs by both colleges and work-based learning providers. However a minority of providers are not using this information to target resources to support learners.
- 38 Providers are required to enter results of an ‘exit assessment’ on the Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR) for learners who have received basic skills support. This is an assessment of a learner’s level in basic skills at the end of their learning. Providers are not consistent in collecting this information for all learners and there is

a lack of consistency in what providers enter on the database for an 'exit assessment'. This means that there is no accurate measurement of the effectiveness of support for learners across providers.

- 39 Overall, providers experience difficulties in recruiting basic skills staff with current specialist teaching qualifications to support learners. In colleges, the majority of staff who deliver basic skills support have basic skills qualifications. However, the majority of staff delivering support in work-based learning and schools do not hold these qualifications. As a result, there is a lack of consistency across the sectors in the quality of support for learners. In addition, few staff have the specialist teaching qualifications to support ESOL learners.
- 40 A minority of providers successfully link with other primary basic skills providers who deliver support for learners and track learners' progress.
- 41 Providers use different methods to measure how many learners take up support. This means it is not possible to make accurate comparisons between providers about the percentage of learners identified with need who take up support.
- 42 Overall, few providers use data to measure the impact of support on learners' achievement. In the best examples of data collection, colleges measure the impact of support on retention and attainment at course level.
- 43 Learners interviewed are positive about the support they receive and feel it is helping them to succeed on their courses.
- 44 The most successful way of tracking learners' progress in basic skills is through specialist one-to one support. Around half of the providers visited offer this type of support. Most learners receiving this support have an Individual Learning Plan. This breaks down a learner's progress into elements which link to the adult basic skills core curriculum. Tracking of learners' progress for those who do not receive this type of support is poorly developed.
- 45 There are opportunities in adult community-based learning for learners to improve their basic skills. Not enough tutors in this sector receive basic skills training, to make them aware of learners' basic skills needs, so that they can embed basic skills in their teaching in the community.

Recommendations

- 46 To better identify learners who have basic skills needs and improve the help and support for these learners, the Welsh Assembly Government and providers should build on the work already in place and carry out the following recommendations.

The Welsh Assembly Government should:

- R1 ensure consistency in funding between providers who are required to support learners identified with basic skills needs;
- R2 research further whether different initial assessment tools give comparable results;
- R3 clarify the guidance to providers about 'exit assessments' for those learners who receive support for their identified basic skills need so that management information can be collected and used effectively;
- R4 develop guidance for providers on appropriate initial assessment and support for ESOL learners;
- R5 work with stakeholders to develop more materials for learners to improve their basic skills as an integral part of their vocational courses;
- R6 encourage providers to work better together to share initial assessment materials; and
- R7 set national targets so that all providers identify appropriate numbers of staff who need to obtain level 2, 3 and 4 qualifications in basic skills, to improve the support for learners identified with basic skills and ESOL needs.

Providers should:

- R8 develop more robust tracking and measuring systems to show the impact of support on the retention and achievement of learners;
- R9 continue to increase the number of learners identified with a need who receive support and ensure learners receive support on a regular basis;
- R10 introduce measures to increase the number of learners accessing one-to-one support;
- R11 target resources to support learners in learning areas identified with the highest levels of basic skills needs;
- R12 ensure all staff giving specialist basic skills support to learners hold a basic skills qualification;

Post-16 Basic Skills Provision
Basic Skills Initial Assessment, Support and Monitoring Systems

- R13 continue to deliver basic skills awareness training to all staff who have contact with learners;
- R14 train more staff to deliver specialist ESOL support to learners;
- R15 introduce initial assessment of learners before they start their course, so that staff can place learners on the correct level of course for their skills level;
- R16 continue to improve the way initial assessment is explained to learners and how feedback on results is given to learners;
- R17 work in partnership with a primary basic skills provider so that qualified staff support learners if demand is too small to provide basic skills support 'in house';
- R18 share good practice with other providers in the use of materials to support learners and in the development of systems to track and measure the impact of support on learners; and
- R19 ensure tutors in adult community-based learning receive basic skills awareness training to encourage them to include basic skills support in their courses.

An evaluation of the implementation and effectiveness of initial assessment

Further education colleges

- 47 The 2005 ELWa guidance 'Basic Skills Policy and Screening and Assessment Guidance for Learning Providers' has had a significant impact on initial assessment carried out in colleges. Providers are assessing larger numbers of learners than in previous years.
- 48 Three of the colleges visited use 'basic and keySKILLBUILDER' (BKSB) and one uses the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) initial assessment. One college changed from using BKSB to the BSA assessment online (with online marking). This was because the provider felt that to assess the very large number of learners using BKSB would take too long. As a result of this change, the provider found larger numbers of learners identified with need. The provider re-assessed a sample of learners with the BKSB assessment. Results showed a significant percentage of learners assessed as needing basic skills support with the BSA assessment were not identified with a basic skills need on the BKSB assessment (see Appendix 1). These findings indicate that it is only possible to compare percentages of learners identified with a need if providers use the same assessment tools.
- 49 In the college sample of learners, the percentage of learners identified with literacy needs (19%) is lower than those identified with numeracy needs (45%) (see appendix 2). These figures are close to those identified as averages for Wales by a survey for the Basic Skills Agency carried out in 2004³ (25% for literacy and 53% for numeracy). However, in the college sample one college uses a different assessment tool from the others.
- 50 Learners' support needs vary between learning areas (see Appendix 3). In the majority of cases, learners' basic skills needs are high in both literacy and numeracy in the learning areas identified. However there are examples where only numeracy needs are high. Most colleges are responding to these findings by focussing their 'on course' support in learning areas with the highest levels of need.
- 51 All colleges visited use online assessments. In one college, learners can opt to complete the assessment on paper. This helps learners who feel less confident using a computer for assessment.
- 52 Most learners have an initial assessment at induction. However, for many learners this is too late to ensure they enrol on the correct level of course for their skills level. One college is introducing BKSB assessment at interview for enrolment in September 2006. To assist further in matching learners to the correct level of course, this college has linked the needs of each course to the elements of the literacy and numeracy core curriculum.

³ The National Survey of Adult Basic Skills in Wales (2004)

- 53 There are an increasing number of learners for whom English is their second language. One college screens ESOL learners before they undertake initial assessment in case their language skills are too low to carry out the BSA initial assessment. If their skills are too low, the provider carries out an initial assessment using more suitable materials.
- 54 Nearly all staff delivering initial assessment in colleges have received training to administer this and to give feedback to learners. Most colleges have successful processes in place to inform course tutors of the results of initial assessment. Tutors then know about learners who may struggle on the course and who will need encouragement to seek extra help.
- 55 Most learners interviewed are positive about the initial assessment process. Providers had explained it to them well. However, providers had not given one-to-one feedback to a few learners. This discourages learners from taking up support.

Work-based learning providers

- 56 Nearly all work-based learning providers are implementing the ELWa guidance to assess learners. In a very few cases, screening rather than initial assessment is still used with post-19 learners. In these cases providers are unable to identify learners' basic skills levels.
- 57 Most providers use paper based Basic Skills Agency initial assessment materials to assess learners. About half of the providers do not use staff trained in basic skills to administer initial assessment. As a consequence, the quality of feedback to learners about initial assessment results is too varied. In the best examples, learners receive one-to-one feedback from a qualified basic skills tutor.
- 58 Learners' reactions to initial assessment vary. One provider introduced 'online' assessment. However, learners were nervous about using the computer so the provider went back to paper based assessment and learners then co-operated fully in the process. Learners in employment are concerned about the use of the results from initial assessment. They believe their results might impact on their employment. In the best practice, work-based learning providers dispel these fears. They explain to learners how they use initial assessment results to indicate the need for support and that the results are confidential.
- 59 Many providers experience difficulties assessing learners based in the workplace. A minority are concerned that they spend time assessing learners whose results show they do not have basic skills needs. Most of these are learners on higher level programmes. However, if providers do not assess these learners those who have basic skills needs will not receive the support they require to complete their programme. Also, a few employers are unhappy to give learners time off work for assessment.
- 60 One provider used the BSA literacy initial assessment with ESOL learners in employment. However, the provider could not assess learners satisfactorily because their language skills were too low for this test. The provider had no appropriate

alternative assessment materials. As a result the learners did not proceed with their training.

- 61 In the work-based learning sample of learners the percentage of learners identified with literacy needs is high (45%). This is much higher than the Wales average of 25%. For numeracy the percentage is also high (51%) but falls just below the Wales' average of 53%.
- 62 Learners' support needs vary between learning areas (see Appendix 3). There are similarities between those learning areas identified with high needs by both colleges and work-based learning providers. In the majority of cases, learners' basic skills needs are high in both literacy and numeracy in the learning areas identified. However in Retail and Customer Services only numeracy needs are high.

School sixth forms

- 63 All schools use PLASC⁴ data to inform them of learners' starting points. Two of the schools visited use BSA Initial Assessment paper based materials to assess their sixth formers for basic skills needs. One compares the BSA initial assessment results with the GCSE grades. There is a general match between those learners with below C at GCSE in English and maths and those identified with basic skills needs. However, in a very few cases, learners are identified with basic skills needs who have a C or above at GCSE.
- 64 One of the schools was very positive about carrying out the assessments. Staff felt they were more aware of learners with basic skills needs as a result of the assessments. They now place a greater emphasis on support for those identified. The school passes the assessment results to teachers to alert teachers to learners who may have basic skills needs.
- 65 The use of initial assessment is useful in schools which have a large number of learners entering the sixth form from another school. In an example of good practice one school has developed a post -16 basic skills assessment and support action plan. This ensures that staff contact the previous school of learners who join in the sixth form, to identify their learning needs.
- 66 The number of learners needing basic skills support in school sixth forms is low (see Appendix 2). However, the use of different initial assessment tools makes the comparison with other sectors difficult.
- 67 There is a lack of consistency between schools giving one-to-one feedback to learners about initial assessment results. One school does not give feedback to learners because staff believe it reinforces learners' beliefs that they cannot achieve well in literacy and numeracy. However, if schools do not give feedback this reduces learners' ability to know where they need to improve and to take responsibility for their own learning.

⁴ PLASC Pupil Level Annual School Census

CCET plans to use a common initial assessment tool for all post-16 providers

- 68 Flintshire CCET is exploring using a common initial assessment tool across all post-16 providers. They aim to standardise the recording of learners' levels of need between sectors and to improve the sharing of learners' initial assessment information between providers. Partners involved plan to run a pilot scheme in 2006 to 2007.

An evaluation of support for learners and the development of monitoring systems

Further education colleges

- 69 Many colleges use the term 'Essential Skills' to mean basic skills and/or key skills. This presents basic skills in a more positive light and avoids using the term 'basic' with learners when providers offer support.
- 70 All colleges use a range of methods to deliver targeted basic skills support. The two main methods are one-to-one/small group specialist support and 'on course' support. Colleges deliver most of the one-to-one/small group support in a workshop or learning centre.
- 71 'On course' basic skills support takes the following forms:
- part of vocational sessions, delivered by mainstream staff;
 - teaching support or team teaching, where basic skills tutors work alongside mainstream staff; and
 - a Learning Support Assistant within taught classes supports one or more learners under guidance from a mainstream tutor.
- 72 Most colleges also use Learn Direct and other IT resources such as BBC Skillswise to support learners. These supplement one-to-one support and provide flexibility for the learner. A few learners are unable to attend college for support and providers offer them support through the post and by email. One college is running a pilot project to support distance learners in Equine Studies through a Virtual Learning Environment although this is at too early a stage to comment on its effectiveness.
- 73 This wide range of support opportunities means colleges support more learners with basic skills needs in one or more ways. However, they have more learners to assess. Learning support co-ordinators consequently are experiencing delays in arranging support for individuals.
- 74 All colleges offer one-to-one/small group support for learners in well equipped, accessible support centres based in Learning Resource Centres. These are welcoming venues which encourage learners to attend for support. The majority of learners supported in this way undertake a further diagnostic assessment and have an Individual Learning Plan to track their progress. This means learners receive support closely matched to their needs. However, colleges find that many learners will not access one-to-one support. For the majority of learners this type of support is not in their timetable so those that attend do so in their free time. Many learners still feel too embarrassed to attend one-to-one support.
- 75 As many learners are not willing to access one-to-one support, all colleges visited are increasing their 'on course' support for basic skills. Providers find this the most

successful way to reach the greatest number of learners identified with basic skills needs and help them make progress. Learners like this type of support because they are in familiar surroundings; they do not feel singled out. In the best examples of support, Basic Skills tutors team teach with vocational tutors.

- 76 Many vocational tutors receive basic skills awareness training. A minority complete the City and Guilds 9295 level 2 qualification, the Certificate for Adult Learner Support. This training helps them include basic skills support successfully in their lessons. Many colleges combine 'on course' basic skills support with support for key skills. They use this arrangement on foundation level courses where levels of need are high. Courses where this arrangement is used include Hair and Beauty, Media and Arts, Health and Social Care and Sport. Colleges have also tried this method of delivering support on a minority of intermediate level courses such as ICT. On all these courses this method works successfully.
- 77 In one college, basic skills tutors give whole class support to vocational tutors on a request basis, for up to eight weeks. Basic skills tutors then move on to other courses, responding to the need for support as it arises. This approach is proving successful and the number of learners achieving successful outcomes on these courses has increased.
- 78 Providers use a wide range of resources to support learners to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. However, there is a lack of materials for learners to improve their basic skills as an integral part of their vocational courses.
- 79 Most colleges are beginning to monitor the percentage of learners receiving support. Colleges' analyses of their data for 2005 - 2006 shows that the percentage of learners identified with need and those receiving support varies. The percentages receiving support in literacy range from 25% to 62% in the four colleges. In numeracy, where there are larger numbers identified with need, the percentages receiving support range from 45% to 50%. However, figures are not always comparable between colleges because some colleges only record take up of one-to-one support whilst others record those supported 'on course'. In addition, learners whose literacy and numeracy skills are below the level of their course are sometimes included in the figures although they may not have basic skills needs. Evidence from 2005-2006 college data shows the majority of colleges have an increased number of learners receiving support.
- 80 Colleges track learners' progress in basic skills in a variety of ways. In the best practice, learners who receive one-to-one basic skills support have Individual Learning Plans linked to the core curriculum. These measure learners' progress in basic skills as they achieve elements of the core curriculum. However, many providers do not track the progress in basic skills of an individual who receives 'on course' basic skills support. Instead, colleges track the progress of the group. This reduces the ability of individual learners to know where they need to improve and to take responsibility for their own learning.
- 81 In the best examples of data collection and analysis, colleges develop systems to measure the impact of support on retention and attainment at course level. On one course, learners with a literacy need who received support, achieved a 95%

accreditation rate. Those identified with a need but who did not access support achieved an 82% accreditation rate. However, in a minority of colleges the collection and analysis of data on the impact of support for learners is underdeveloped.

- 82 Providers are not clear about the completion of the Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR) 'exit assessment'. Providers enter results of final basic skills assessments for learners who have received basic skills support on to the LLWR. A minority of providers re-assess learners using a different version of the same initial assessment tool. Others enter information about basic skills or key skills' attainment. One college plans to use learners' progress taken from their Individual Learning Plans. A lack of consistency between providers' inputs to this data field results in poorer data to measure the impact of support.
- 83 Most staff who deliver basic skills support have basic skills qualifications but the levels of their qualifications vary. In a minority of colleges, basic skills tutors are qualified to Level 4 in Basic Skills. In others, staff are qualified to level 3 in Basic Skills and their Learning Support Assistants are qualified to level 2 (C&G 9295). Colleges do not train enough staff to deliver specialist support for ESOL learners. In the best practice, specialist ESOL tutors deliver support for 15 hours per week.
- 84 In all the colleges visited, the numbers of trained basic skills staff to deliver support to learners identified with a basic skills need are inadequate. At the time of writing, it is a condition of funding that colleges spend 50% of the Widening Participation funding on 'on-programme' basic skills support⁵. All colleges are using this Widening Participation funding as required but supplement it substantially.
- 85 Overall, learners' experiences of support are positive. Health and Social Care (Foundation) learners say support is helping them to cope with the theory part of their programme. The Mechanics and Body Repair learners say the 'on course' support enables them to cope with the theory which they find more difficult than the practical part of their programme.
- 86 The majority of learners have 'on course' support. This helps them continue with their course, complete assignments and gain successful module results.
- 87 Those learners who access one-to-one support in study centres are very positive about this. They can discuss literacy and numeracy issues that they have struggled with for many years, in a supportive environment. As they realise the benefits of support, a minority increase their visits to the support centres from one to two visits per week. In the best basic skills support of this type learners achieve literacy and numeracy accreditation for the first time.
- 88 A few learners know of others who would benefit from one-to-one support but they cannot persuade them to attend. Only a minority of learners have one-to-one support in their timetables. However, many learners attend in their free time.

⁵ From August 2006, there will be a different condition of funding in NPFS to support learners identified with basic skills needs in FE.

- 89 The few ESOL learners interviewed cannot access specialist ESOL support. However, they say they are coping with the support they are receiving. Many ESOL learners on level 2 and level 3 courses do not get the specialist support they need.

Work-based learning providers

- 90 The quality of support for learners identified with basic skills needs in Work-Based learning is too variable. A majority of providers deliver support through key skills sessions. A minority offer basic skills support through key skills in a centre for groups of learners. A few offer one-to-one basic skills support.
- 91 In the best examples of basic skills support, delivery is to a group of learners from the same vocational area. Providers support learners through team teaching by a vocational tutor and a basic skills tutor. Providers also train work-based learning staff as Basic Skills Champions to support learners in the workplace and liaise with vocational tutors as necessary.
- 92 One of the main benefits of the delivery of basic skills support through key skills is that learners are not 'identified' as having basic skills needs to other learners and so do not feel attention is drawn to them. However, a minority of providers do not employ staff with a basic skills qualification to deliver this support and, therefore, do not fully address learners' basic skills needs.
- 93 A few providers give learners identified with a need a diagnostic assessment. Providers who do this give learners basic skills support which is most appropriate to their needs. One provider found that a minority of learners' results showed their skills were identified at a higher level on the diagnostic assessment than on their initial assessment, this is similar to the findings in one college.
- 94 In the best examples of support in work-based learning, providers train NVQ workplace assessors in the delivery of basic skills. This means that they provide basic skills support to the majority of learners who do not come into a centre but remain in the workplace for their training. However, employers are sometimes reluctant to release learners for this support and learners are also reluctant to receive extra support as they do not want to be 'singled out'.
- 95 A minority of providers link with other primary basic skills providers who deliver support for learners and track learners' progress. One group of learners attends college for their key skills training and have help from Learning Support Assistants.
- 96 In the few providers visited who offer one-to-one basic skills support delivered by qualified staff, only a minority of learners take this up. In providers with Jobcentre Plus initial assessment contracts, only small numbers of those identified with a basic skills need opt for basic skills support.
- 97 Only a minority of work-based learning providers effectively track the progress learners make in basic skills. In the best practice, the few learners who receive specialist one-to-one basic skills support have an Individual Learning Plan which records their progress in basic skills. However, for the majority of learners who

receive support as part of their key skills, there is no specific tracking of basic skills' progress in their reviews.

- 98 In the majority of providers, the collection and analysis of data to evaluate the impact of the delivery of basic skills support is poorly developed. Providers are therefore not able to make informed judgements about which support they offer results in learners achieving their qualifications.
- 99 The few learners interviewed are very positive about the support they receive. They have a positive perception of the initial assessment process, an awareness of their results and how these link to where they most need help. Staff made them feel comfortable and not nervous in the initial assessment. Staff had explained to them that having an assessment would be a positive step to find out where they needed help and support to improve their skills.
- 100 Those learners receiving one-to-one specialist basic skills support improve their competence and confidence. They see the progress they are making, for example, moving up a level in numeracy. They link their improvement to the high level of support they receive from the provider.
- 101 Work-based learning providers are concerned about funding for basic skills support within current arrangements. Delivery of support to learners with basic skills needs who are on Foundation Modern Apprenticeship or Modern Apprenticeship frameworks is not a condition of funding. However, providers who give good quality basic skills support find this helps learners achieve their learning outcomes which triggers outcome payments.
- 102 Many work-based learning providers are unclear how they fund learners who receive basic skills support and achieve a basic skills qualification. As a result, a minority of learners do not take a basic skills accreditation, even though this might be appropriate for them.
- 103 Work-based learning providers are also confused about the completion of the LLWR 'exit assessment' data field. Providers interpret the LLWR guidance in different ways. A few plan to use key skills results for learners identified with basic skills needs who have received support. A few providers are using version two of the BSA initial assessment tool. A minority of providers are not able to complete this data field for learners who leave early. This lack of consistency between providers' inputs to this data field results in poor quality data to measure the impact of support.

School sixth forms

- 104 The majority of basic skills support in the sixth forms visited is for the minority of learners who are following vocational courses and re-sitting maths and English GCSE. In an example of good practice a school runs an extra maths group to support a vocational course. All the schools visited run discrete groups for learners re-sitting GCSE maths and English.
- 105 The schools have informal arrangements to support the few learners identified with basic skills needs. In schools which use initial assessment, managers make

teachers aware of learners who need support. Teachers support these learners in their groups when they require help. However, most teachers do not have specific basic skills training which means they are not aware of the most appropriate ways to help learners with basic skills needs.

- 106 Schools are concerned about funding basic skills support within current funding arrangements.
- 107 The few learners interviewed in schools are on Level 2 vocational courses. They feel they receive good information and guidance about the demands of the course, although they find there is more writing than they expected. Despite this, they feel they are coping well. They know they can get help at any time on their course and feel they are receiving good support in small groups when working on their portfolios. They are comfortable asking for help. Learners receive support in the context of the needs of their course. Learners are on track to achieve their qualifications.
- 108 Although numbers of learners supported in the sixth forms are low, schools do not track their progress in basic skills enough. The informal arrangements in place for support make tracking difficult.
- 109 Schools are also confused about completion of the LLWR exit assessment data field. Most schools plan to record key skills results and results of GCSE re-sits in English and maths. One school is considering re-assessing those learners on a one year course. Schools visited do not complete this data field for the minority of learners who leave early. In this sector too there is a lack of consistency between providers' inputs to this data field which results in poor quality data to measure the impact of support.

Adult community-based learning delivered by a local education authority

- 110 The ELWa guidance does not cover most local education authorities' ACL provision as most learners attend for under five hours a week. However, inspectors visited one local education authority's adult community-based learning provision to consider issues about the initial assessment of adult community-based learners.
- 111 The provider is aware that a minority of learners on ACL courses would benefit from basic skills support. The provider is adopting a number of approaches to explore the most appropriate way to meet the needs of these learners:
- running basic skills awareness training - first for reception staff at adult centres and then for adult tutors. Common Investment Fund (CIF) money is being used to support this training;
 - finding out the literacy and numeracy content of courses - tutors have completed a questionnaire about the amount of literacy and numeracy contained in their course;
 - planning a pilot project to initially assess learners on a restricted number of courses which have a high literacy and numeracy content;
 - researching the most appropriate initial assessment tool to use with ACL learners;
 - gathering tutors' reactions to initial assessment; and
 - gathering reactions to initial assessment from a few learners.
- 112 All these approaches demonstrate good practice to attempt to support learners with basic skills needs on their courses. In particular, training staff in basic skills awareness encourages them to include basic skills support in their courses. This is most appropriate on courses which have a high content of literacy and numeracy. Other providers also use this approach. In one college's Adult Community-Based programme recently inspected by Estyn, (Conwy) 25% of this programme's enrolments is in courses with integrated basic skills support.

Appendix 1

Comparison of results of initial assessment using two different tools

One college took a sample of learners who had undertaken BSA initial assessment and re-assessed them using the BKSB diagnostic assessment. The results of their findings are as follows:

Literacy

140 learners re-assessed

52% of those assessed at Entry level 3 or below on the BSA test scored Level 1 or above on the BKSB diagnostic assessment.

Numeracy

81 learners re-assessed

28% of those assessed at Entry level 3 or below on the BSA test scored Level 1 or above on the BKSB diagnostic assessment.

This same college also gave a cohort of Access learners in September the BSA initial assessment. In February they gave a new cohort of Access learners the BKSB initial assessment. The results of their findings are as follows:

BSA initial assessment September cohort

Literacy	67 learners assessed	22% identified with a literacy need
Numeracy	62 learners assessed	77% identified with a numeracy need

BKSB assessment February cohort

Literacy	32 learners assessed	3% identified with a literacy need
Numeracy	31 learners assessed	48% identified with a numeracy need

Appendix 2

Summary of initial assessment results (of providers visited)

Colleges

	Numbers assessed above level 1	Numbers assessed at level 1	Numbers assessed at entry level 3	Numbers assessed at entry level 2	Numbers assessed at entry level 1 and below	% below level 1
Literacy	3141 (38%)	3617 (43%)	1189 (14%)	241 (3%)	128 (2%)	19%
Numeracy	905 (13%)	3007 (42%)	2601 (36%)	506 (7%)	95 (2%)	45%

Work-based learning providers

	Numbers assessed above level 1	Numbers assessed at level 1	Numbers assessed at entry level 3	Numbers assessed at entry level 2	Numbers assessed at entry level 1 and below	% below level 1
Literacy	55 (11%)	196 (44%)	156 (34%)	44 (10%)	6 (1%)	45%
Numeracy	49 (10%)	178 (39%)	170 (39%)	56 (11%)	10 (1%)	51%

School sixth forms

	Numbers assessed above level 1	Numbers assessed at level 1	Numbers assessed at entry level 3	Numbers assessed at entry level 2	Numbers assessed at entry level 1 and below	% below level 1
Literacy	-	-	-	-	-	3%
Numeracy	-	-	-	-	-	5%

Appendix 3

Literacy and numeracy needs by learning area (of providers visited)

Providers stated the percentage of learners they had identified with basic skills needs by learning area. The following list summarises the findings for those learning areas with the highest literacy and numeracy needs.

1 Work-based learning providers

The highest literacy needs are found in:

- Health, Public Services and Care;
- Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies;
- Construction, Planning and the Built Environment;
- Hair and Beauty; and
- Leisure, Travel and Tourism.

The highest numeracy needs are found in:

- Health, Public Services and Care;
- Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies;
- Retailing and Customer Services;
- Hair and Beauty; and
- Leisure, Travel and Tourism.

2 Colleges

The highest literacy needs are found in:

- Health, Public Services and Care;
- Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies;
- ICT;
- Hair and Beauty;
- Hospitality and Catering;
- Leisure, Travel and Tourism; and
- Pre-vocational.

The highest numeracy needs are found in:

- Health, Public Services and Care;
- Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies;
- ICT;
- Hair and Beauty
- Hospitality and Catering;
- Business Administration and Law;
- Leisure, Travel and Tourism; and
- Pre-vocational.

Note: The sample of learners is smaller in work-based learning providers than in colleges (see figures in Appendix 2).