

5. How will functional skills work in my centre?

links to **CSF 2: Implementing an effective curriculum model**

Leaders and managers will be responsible for implementing an effective curriculum model in their centre. This will be a key part of planning and preparing for the functional skills pilot. This booklet examines some crucial issues in relation to:

- choosing an appropriate delivery model for your centre
- developing appropriate systems and procedures to support learners from induction to accreditation
- making best use of staff skills and experience.

5.1 Planning for delivery

links to **CSF 5: Delivering effective teaching and learning**

Functional skills are transferable skills

Functional skills are essentially concerned with developing and recognising the ability of learners to apply and transfer skills in ways that are appropriate to their situation.

This means that functional skills are:

- real skills
- for real audiences
- for real purposes

and that learners should be able to:

- apply functional skills in other subjects, in work, in the community, and in their social and family life outside the setting in which they are learning
- see the links between the functional skills, for example the use of ICT skills in mathematics or the use of English skills in ICT.

This has implications for how the teaching of functional skills is organised.

- Functional skills teachers need opportunities to share schemes of work and lesson planning, both within their centre and across partnerships. They will need time to do this.
- Teachers of other subjects should identify the skills that learners need to succeed in those subjects and should plan how these needs will be addressed. They will need time to do this.
- Teachers responsible for planning work-related or work-based learning should liaise with employers to identify opportunities for learners to develop and apply functional skills in context. They will need time to do this.

Managing delivery: 5. How will functional skills work in my centre?

- Teachers in community and secure settings should identify the skills that learners need in their life and work and plan how these needs will be addressed. They will need time to do this.
- Learners should be encouraged to reflect on how they can transfer their functional skills learning to contexts other than those in which they are working at the time.

The ability to accumulate and transfer learning through a varied career directly addresses the needs of people in an economy which no longer guarantees jobs for life.

Ken Boston, Chief Executive QCA

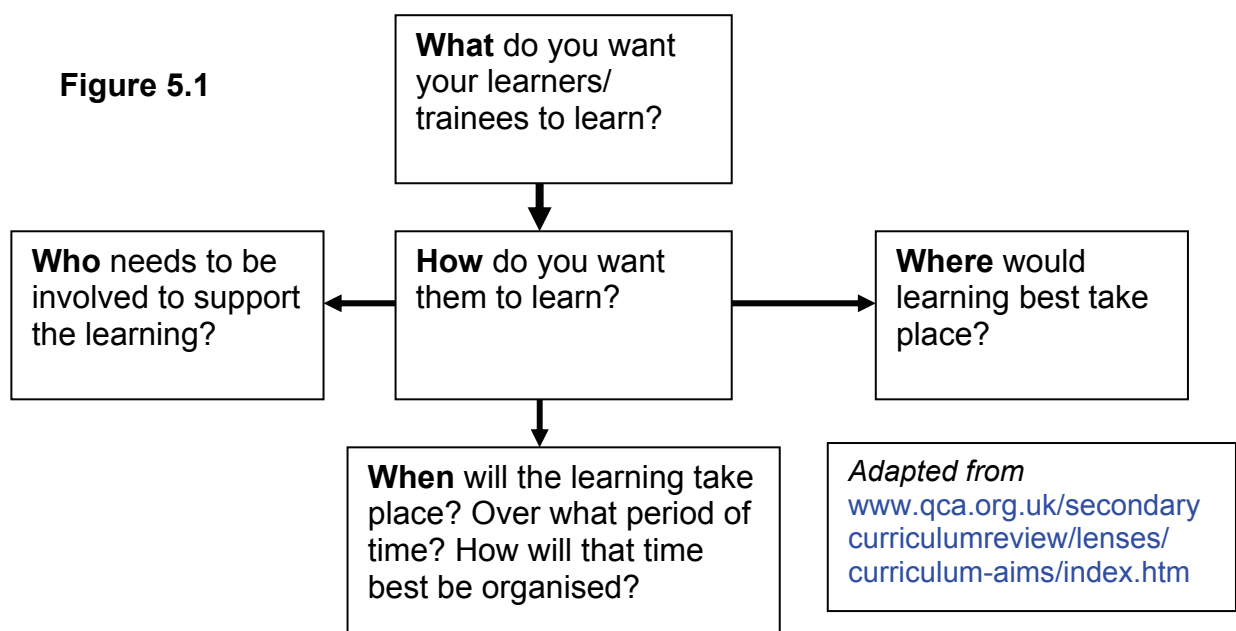
In every setting, the curriculum should provide learners with a coherent experience in which functional skills enable them to:

- access learning
- make connections between the subjects they study
- transfer their skills between curriculum subjects and wider activities
- develop their personal abilities, attributes and attitudes.

As a leader or senior manager, you will need to consider:

- how functional skills will be developed in your centre
- where these skills will be applied
- who will be involved in the learning process
- how your approach will be phased over time.

The flowchart in Figure 5.1 may help to structure your thinking.



Case study

Developing literacy and numeracy skills in the workplace

A large services company operates globally and employs around 29,000 people in the UK. It provides operational, management and consulting expertise across a broad spectrum of sectors, including aerospace, defence, health, local government, science and transport.

The Head of People Development is confident that there is a significant basic skills gap in the company's workforce. She says 'I estimate that as many as a quarter of our employees are operating below an acceptable standard of literacy and numeracy.'

The firm's strategy to give staff access to learning and development opportunities is driven by top level commitment. Its chairman is passionate about raising the basic skills level of the workforce.

According to the Head of People Development, an individual's shortfall in basic literacy and numeracy can act as an 'unconscious blocker' to their career aspirations, can cause low self-esteem and affect their motivation to learn. Any functional skills programme needs to address this barrier to learning.

The company's approach of ensuring that the training is relevant, accessible and practical has paid off, encouraging a high participation rate.

The company is creative in how it reaches out to its people and makes a considerable effort to meet them on their terms. Local training providers have been encouraged to do the same, using roadshows or mobile computing facilities to promote enrolment.

The Head of People Development would like to see improvements in the functional English of school-leaver recruits, in particular for all types of written communication including email, letter, memo and report writing. For functional mathematics, she would like all school leavers to have a good grounding in mental arithmetic, including multiplication tables, percentages and ratios.

Adapted from the CBI report *Working on the Three Rs: Employers' priorities for functional skills in Mathematics and English* (DfES, 2006).

5.2 Four approaches to delivery

When considering the delivery of functional skills in the context of a wider learning programme, it is helpful to think in terms of four possible approaches.

Discrete

Functional skills are taught by specialists separately from other subject areas. Typically the specialists take responsibility for all aspects of the teaching and learning of functional skills, and of any internal assessment.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Easier to track learners' progress	Learners do not understand the relevance and transferability of functional skills
Easier to manage communications as functional skills team is smaller	Learners may encounter a wide range of contexts but often these lack purpose or appear contrived
Staff more likely to be experts, eg English, mathematics or ICT teachers	Attendance may be poor

Partly embedded

Functional skills are taught by specialists and are flexibly applied in a range of contexts in other areas of the learner's main programme of study or training.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Learners have access to functional skills experts	Time has to be allowed for liaison between functional skills teachers and main programme teachers
Learners see the relevance of functional skills to their main programme of study	Main programme teachers need training in identifying functional skills in their programmes
Provides learners with relevant contexts	Links between functional skills not explicitly made
	Experiences may be loosely mapped but are rarely coherently planned or monitored

Managing delivery: 5. How will functional skills work in my centre?

Mostly embedded

Functional skills are taught by specialists, and are reinforced and applied in a range of purposeful contexts within and across the learner's programme. Learners explicitly develop and apply functional skills across the curriculum.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Learners have access to functional skills experts	Time has to be allowed for liaison between functional skills teachers and main programme teachers
Learners see the relevance of functional skills to their main programme of study or training	Main programme teachers need training in identifying functional skills in their programmes
Explicit planning of experiences across a wide range of the learner's programme	Requires good communications across the centre
Provides learners with relevant contexts	
Learning is reinforced and developed with explicit reference to learners' previous experiences	

Fully embedded

Functional skills are taught, developed and applied across the programme of learning by all teachers. Learners use naturally occurring opportunities for functional skills development.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Learners see the relevance and transferability of functional skills	More difficult to track delivery of functional skills across a range of activities
Teachers tend to use a wider range of teaching and learning methods in their main programmes	May lead to duplication and repetition across subjects
Drives up standards of work and achievement rates in main programmes	Increases assessment demands on all teaching staff
No additional timetabling	Considerable staff development implications as not all staff feel competent or confident about supporting the development of functional skills
No problems with attendance at functional skills sessions	

Managing delivery: 5. How will functional skills work in my centre?

A more detailed version of these models, with variations, can be found in *Leading from the middle*, published by the Key Skills Support Programme.

5.3 Implications of the four approaches for leaders and managers within and across centres

links to **CSF 2: Implementing an effective curriculum model**

Research has shown that the most effective approaches are likely to be those involving at least some degree of embedding. The key is that learners can see and understand the relevance and transferability of functional skills.

The usefulness of all three functional skills subject areas in tackling any given task or problem means that the learner can draw on a range of skills to use as appropriate in a given task or situation. This transferability is essential in the three-stage process of learning. A successful learner:

- develops and builds the full range of functional skills
- practises applying those skills in a range of contexts
- demonstrates mastery in a range of contexts.

The experience of organisations involved in delivering key skills or Skills for Life suggests that, to engage learners, it is essential to motivate them. This is easier to achieve when learners can see that improving their functional skills is helping them to do better in the rest of their programme. For learners studying functional skills on a stand-alone basis, it is essential that they can see the potential of functional skills to increase their chances of obtaining employment and/or promotion, and to help them manage their everyday lives, including their financial affairs.

From the staff perspective, key advantages of embedding include:

- shared understanding of the importance of functional skills to raising learners' achievement
- shared responsibility for reinforcing and developing these skills
- the fact that the organisation as a whole has 'bought into' functional skills
- understanding of the value of developing teaching approaches as part of CPD.

Research by the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy shows that, on 79 vocational programmes where delivery of literacy and numeracy was embedded,

- retention was 16% higher
- success rates were higher in the main qualification, particularly at Level 2 (by 26%)
- 93% of those with an identified literacy need achieved a literacy/ESOL qualification, compared to 50% for those on non-embedded courses

Managing delivery: 5. How will functional skills work in my centre?

- 93% of those with an identified numeracy need achieved a numeracy/maths qualification, compared to 70% for those on non-embedded courses
- learners had more positive attitudes to studying literacy and numeracy.

Source: *'You wouldn't expect a maths teacher to teach plastering...'* (NRDC, 2007)

The research also showed that, where a single teacher was asked to take responsibility for teaching both the main qualification and literacy and numeracy, learners were twice as likely to fail with their literacy and numeracy qualifications. However, learners did benefit from being taught by teams of staff, each with their own different areas of expertise, working closely together in a coordinated way. Team teaching was particularly effective, often with the help of support staff and teaching assistants.

Many centres have found an embedded approach more challenging at the start. Many have found it more effective to work towards embedding over a period of years. The pilot offers an excellent opportunity to take this step-by-step approach, which will evolve and develop as staff expertise and confidence increase.

Whichever approach you choose, you will need to ensure that there are adequate arrangements for learners to:

- develop functional skills to the levels suited to their individual needs and goals
- be taught the underpinning skills and understanding
- practise and apply the skills in relevant and meaningful contexts
- review their skills development
- prepare for assessment.

For schools, the *Literacy and Learning* (2004) resources from the National Strategies (Secondary) and, in particular, the guidance for senior managers contain useful strategies to support skills development and transfer that could be applied to the development of functional skills.

5.4 Structures, systems and procedures

links to **CSF 4: Coordinating activity across the institution/consortium**

Planning

The questions in Table 5.1 can act as a starting-point to begin the planning process with your leaders and programme managers.

Managing delivery: 5. How will functional skills work in my centre?

Table 5.1

Where in our curriculum are there opportunities to:		
i)	teach functional skills at a level appropriate to the learner?	
ii)	practise and develop functional skills in contexts that are relevant and motivating for the learner, and that demonstrate the transferability of these skills?	
iii)	use appropriate resources to teach functional skills?	
iv)	provide access to ICT facilities to support effective teaching of all three functional skills?	

If you already have an approach that builds on the good practice developed through the experiences of implementing key skills and Skills for Life, you will be able to give a positive answer to each question.

If any of the questions highlights a weakness in your current arrangements, you can begin to plan to improve the situation.

Consider the implications of the following features (Table 5.2) of an effective approach to delivering functional skills. Decide which are in place in your centre and/or partnership and what action is required.

Managing delivery: 5. How will functional skills work in my centre?

Table 5.2

Feature	In place? Yes / partly / no	Action required
Induction is tailored to individual learners		
The early initial assessment of learners' functional skills produces information that staff can access and use		
Staff know how to use the information from early initial assessment when teaching learners		
Results of early initial assessment are reflected in schemes of work and lesson plans		
Activities and tasks used for teaching and learning embed functional skills wherever appropriate		
There are embedded activities and tasks for development and teaching in context		
Resources are regularly monitored and revised where necessary		
Good practice in embedding is shared across the centre/consortium		
ICT facilities and resources to support functional skills are included in appropriate budgets and for capital expenditure purposes		

Guided learning hours

When deciding which is the most appropriate curriculum model for your centre, it is worth noting that the DCSF recommends that each functional skills unit requires 30–45 guided learning hours.

This means that, to teach each functional skill subject, give feedback to the learner and prepare for assessment requires between 30 and 45 hours, depending on the learner's starting point in terms of skills levels covered by the subject.

Case study

HM Prison Askham Grange

This is an open prison for women and is often the last prison before release. Offenders can attend the local college, participate in community work and undertake paid employment outside. The education provision is subcontracted to City College, Manchester and offers a range of qualifications from Entry level to Level 2. The prison service offers a range of vocational programmes.

The existing model for developing literacy and numeracy was not working well, with learners finding the discrete literacy and numeracy sessions 'boring'. The sessions were geared to passing the tests, to meet one of the educational key performance indicators. Literacy and numeracy qualifications would undoubtedly help in the resettlement process so the emphasis needed to be on developing learners' skills, not only on passing the test.

The project aimed to:

- develop a holistic approach to education integrating Skills for Life into vocational areas or relevant contextualised activities
- explore models of delivery
- improve learners' motivation.

The project team developed a scheme of work on the topic of 'healthy lifestyle'. The scheme included a range of materials and resources aimed at embedding literacy and numeracy in the vocational programmes. In addition, staff developed a template for a model lesson plan.

Although the project achieved its main objective of producing a scheme of work based on 'healthy lifestyle' there is still work to do. For example, the topics have been reviewed, as one topic – alcohol – was not well received by the learners.

Going forward, the intention is to deliver the Skills for Life curriculum through themed courses supported by discrete numeracy and literacy workshop sessions.

Source: Supporting centres to innovate and develop effective key skills and Skills for Life practice: KSSP development projects 2005/2006 (KSSP, 2007)

Managing delivery: 5. How will functional skills work in my centre?

Effective systems and procedures for implementing functional skills

Does your planned delivery model ensure the following?

- An experiential activity-based approach to learning
- Identification of opportunities to develop and apply functional skills across the curriculum
- Regular monitoring and reviews of learner progress
- Formative assessment (assessment for learning)
- Effective use of tutorial systems
- Tracking of learner progress and achievement
- Appropriate summative assessment opportunities when learners are ready.

How will you implement the systems and procedures that are not yet in place?

Effective assessment for learning

links to **CSF 6: Establishing clear assessment procedures, both internal and external**

It is important to provide support both for ongoing formative assessment and for summative assessment (see also booklet 1, 'How do functional skills fit into the bigger picture?', page 8).

Effective formative assessment is characterised by:

- constructive feedback, both formal and informal, that leads to learner action
- a variety of types of feedback, for example oral and written, perhaps by email or via a VLE
- ongoing action planning and regular reviews of progress
- identification of support needed to make further progress
- identification of specific skills areas for further development
- confirmation of aspects of skills which have been mastered and applied.

Effective preparation for summative assessment is characterised by ensuring that learners:

- are assessed at appropriate levels
- are familiar with the assessment model
- have opportunities to take practice assessments
- are confident in their ability to succeed
- are given feedback on outcomes, quickly and in as much detail as possible.

5.5 Collaborative partnership working

links to **CSF 3: Establishing clearly defined roles and responsibilities**

Management of functional skills both within a centre and across a consortium or partnership must be a priority for the partnership manager. Sharing concerns and developing protocols and procedures within and between organisations must be a key feature of partnership arrangements.

It is likely that, in almost every partnership, there will be at least one organisation that has experience of successfully delivering key skills and/or Skills for Life. Many will also have experience of successfully delivering a range of cross-curricular activities in a variety of contexts. It is vital that all partners in a consortium both contribute to and learn from others' experience, which will include both successes and failures.

Within each organisation, one person should have overall responsibility for functional skills. This coordinator cannot work in isolation, however, and must have the support of all staff.

The coordination role needs to be clearly defined and made explicit within and across organisations. Functional skills coordinators will need time and opportunities to meet, share experiences and develop good practice across the partnership.

The case studies on the following pages illustrate the experience of a range of centres.

Sustainability in collaborative partnerships

'Collaboration is not, fundamentally, an end in itself but a means by which various desirable outcomes can be achieved. While outcomes which have been achieved in relation to curricular provision and student experience and support are crucial, arguably the most significant outcomes are those relating to student participation, retention, progression and achievement... virtually all research evidence on collaboration in education and other social policy fields emphasises the time which is needed to establish strong and effective collaboration.'

Source: *Excellence in supporting applied learning* (Report for LLUK and TDA 2007)

References

Working on the Three Rs (Confederation of British Industry, 2006)

<http://www.cbi.org.uk/pdf/functionalskills0906.pdf>

Leading from the middle (KSSP, 2007)

Literacy and Learning (DfES, 2004)

Literacy and numeracy research from NRDC:

<http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications>

Appendix: Case studies

1. **Otley College: embedding teaching and learning**
How a vocational tutor and a Skills for Life tutor in an FE college worked together to integrate Skills for Life into a construction programme.
2. **Bishop Burton College: embedding teaching and learning**
How a college that supports learners with learning difficulties and disabilities embedded Skills for Life into a horticultural programme.
3. **Stevenage 14-19 Partnership: collaboration between organisations**
How six schools, two special schools, one PRU, the FE college, the local council, a training provider, and the Chamber of Commerce collaborated to offer learners a wider range of programmes.
4. **TUC learndirect Hub: transforming the culture**
How a Whole Organisation Approach can transform the learning culture.

While these case studies draw on experience of delivering key skills and Skills for Life, the lessons learned apply equally to functional skills.

Case study 1

Working in partnership to develop embedded teaching and learning

links to **CSF 2: Implementing an effective curriculum model**

Otley College is an FE college in Suffolk with approximately 450 full-time learners, mainly in the 16–19 age range. 80% of learners have Skills for Life needs. Two 'buddy' practitioners – a construction tutor, and a Skills for Life tutor – work together to plan and teach Skills for Life as an integral part of a Level 1 Foundation Construction Award (FCA) in Wood Occupations. This programme was selected to pilot an embedded approach because:

- there is a history of collaboration between construction and Skills for Life
- construction managers support the concept of embedding
- construction is a rapidly expanding curriculum area.

Transferring embedded practice

To facilitate the transfer of their work to other programmes in construction, the two tutors have focused initially on developing embedded approaches to the delivery of three core units common to several programmes in construction:

- Handle and store resources
- Contribute to work relations
- Contribute to providing work platforms.

The embedded approach is evident to learners from the outset. At enrolment and during induction, the construction tutor emphasises the importance of effective literacy and numeracy skills for success in the construction trade.

The tutors have developed a greater understanding of each other's specialism. This understanding now informs the way they teach. Through working together and learning from each other, they have developed a wider range of teaching strategies. Working as a team has given them the confidence and support to try new ways of doing things. If things don't work, they reflect, move on and try something else. Other construction tutors, recognising the success of these teaching methods in engaging and motivating learners, are now trying out more innovative approaches.

[continued...]

Managing delivery: 5. How will functional skills work in my centre?

Learners benefit from the different styles of the two tutors, which gives them access to a wider range of approaches to teaching and learning.

The more practical, interactive approaches developed by the tutors have led to increased learner participation and involvement in the sessions. Learners have commented that they are enjoying mathematics for the first time. At a recent parents' evening, many parents commented on the learners' enjoyment of the course.

Of those learners who completed the FCA course in 2004/05:

- 100% passed the theory exam
- 100% of the pilot embedded group achieved key skills in Application of Number and Communication at Level 1 or Level 2
- most progressed to the Intermediate level course (ICA).

Adapted from a case study developed by LSN on behalf of the QIA
Whole Organisation Approaches to Delivering Skills for Life
Pathfinder project.

This and other case studies can be found at: www.woasfl.org.uk

Case study 2

Embedding meaningful language, literacy and numeracy in a horticultural programme for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities (NRDC 2005)

The Horticultural Enterprise and Skills Training course at Bishop Burton College, a residential college, was created to fill a gap in the progression route for part-time learners with learning difficulties and disabilities. Its aim is to develop skills through a programme of training that includes horticulture, numeracy, literacy, business and work-related skills.

Communication

Learners have used their oral communication skills in the planning and preparation of materials for sale.

In business studies, emphasis is placed on communicating and working as a team.

In horticulture, learners learn skills such as listening to and following instructions, the use of positional vocabulary, reading and spelling key words and subject words

Numeracy

Learners have adopted a greenhouse area in the nursery and have produced goods for sale. The proceeds from the sales are used to buy resources for the course. Learners have been responsible for purchasing the raw materials.

In business studies, the learners have assisted in the management of the sales and budget.

In horticulture, learners are given the opportunity to develop skills in a practical setting, such as counting and grouping items, and using data collected to produce charts and graphs.

Case study 3

Stevenage 14-19 Partnership

The success of the 14-19 partnership in Stevenage owes a great deal to the commitment of the staff involved in six local 11-19 community schools, two special schools, one Pupil Referral Unit and the local FE College. Other partners include Stevenage Borough Council, a local training provider, and the Chamber of Commerce. In addition, the curriculum design and delivery has ensured the high level of collaboration needed to offer young learners a wider range of courses and subjects. One of the central goals has been to improve learners' levels of literacy (communication) and numeracy (application of number). Another core focus of the current work has been development of the wider key skills through a range of activity-based learning across the curriculum.

Building this commitment has involved creating a number of protocols to define and guide the management and implementation of the curriculum. These policies and procedures have covered all aspects of the arrangements including:

- a single partnership-wide system for learner application and enrolment
- open and transparent systems for learners and staff to record concerns, with agreed follow-up procedures
- joint training activities for staff to ensure consistency of QA across the partnership
- shared costs of transportation kept to a minimum through local tenders, eg for minibuses
- shared timetabling across the local planning area allowing one option column to be taught on one day per week, increasing accessibility for all and reduced transport costs
- fax or email systems of registration and monitoring attendance to ensure that information is immediately shared with the home centre
- shared policies for health and safety, special educational needs and data protection
- ICT-based curriculum resources, such as individual learning plans and online courses.

Collaboration has increased access to Entry level qualifications, NVQs, BTECs and key skills qualifications, including the wider key skills. The opportunity to mix and match courses and levels continues to develop. In addition, learners are benefiting from specialist facilities and expertise, for example at North Herts College. The partnership is exploring opportunities to incorporate provision in special schools, specialist schools offering provision at Level 3, and centred around enterprise and work-based learning opportunities.

Source: *KSSP Newsletter* November 2006

Case study 4

TUC learndirect Hub: transforming the culture of the organisation

The TUC learndirect Hub offers learndirect courses around the country in workplaces, colleges and TUC offices. Skills for Life (SfL) has become an increasingly significant and integral part of the learndirect offer.

Prior to the Hub's involvement in the Whole Organisation Approaches (WOA) pathfinder project, its SfL provision was patchy and the range of courses and quality of support were inconsistent. SfL was seen as solely the business of specialist tutors with learners often having to wait until a SfL tutor was available to start them on their learning journey.

- In April 2005 a SfL project manager was appointed, supported by a project worker, to manage the organisation's participation in the WOA project. Their role includes providing support and training in individual centres where a need is indicated either by quality monitoring visits, by the Hub support team or by individual centres.
- A new Individual Learning Plan (ILP) system was introduced in August 2005 integrating SfL into each stage of the learner journey for all learners from induction and initial interview to planning targets and reviewing progress and achievement.
- Since August 2005, all learners undergo a learndirect initial assessment followed by the option to take a full diagnostic assessment.
- SfL guidance notes for staff were produced and circulated covering, for example, the ILP system, the SfL qualifications required of staff performing particular roles and using the results of initial assessment to enhance teaching and learning.
- Training in the use of the ILP system and initial assessment was provided.
- A SfL area developed on the Hub website enables staff to share best practice, ideas, information, teaching and learning resources and training materials.
- The reporting of SfL progress and issues has been incorporated into centre managers' quarterly reports to the Hub partners' meetings.
- SfL targets are included in every centre's staff development plan.
- Regional SfL focus groups providing general SfL information and training take place regularly.

[continued...]

Impact of embedding Skills for Life into the culture of the organisation

- Centre staff have greater awareness of SfL.
- There is involvement of all Hub staff in SfL.
- There has been increased take-up of SfL provision from 3,606 enrolments in 2004/05 (24% of total enrolments) to 8,531 in 2005/06 (44% of total enrolments).
- The inclusion of SfL initial assessment in the induction process for all learners has been an important factor in increasing the SfL awareness and engagement of staff and learners. Early identification of learners' SfL needs and the ability of staff to address these needs have led to an improved experience for the learner.
- The support and training provided have increased the confidence and skills of centre staff to support SfL learners.

Managing delivery: 5. How will functional skills work in my centre?