

LSIS Research Development Fellowship Programme  
(RDF) 2012 – 13

Research study report

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## **Acknowledgements**

Special thanks to the following colleagues whose contributions to this study were invaluable, Tinyan Akin-Omoyajowo, Pamela Dheer, Angela Shine, Keely Karby, Sarah Harris. Loving thanks to my wife Kim and son Tyler, who have suffered months of me locked in my own world. To my mum Blossom Johnson who supported me during those tough times.

Dedicated to my lost son David.

***Keep your eyes on the prize!!***

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## Ups and Downs: How effective are the new strategies to enhance the teaching of Functional Skills

### **Abstract**

The teaching and learning of Functional Skills is currently a minefield which no sane person would want to get involved in!! Right now when reading this research study many Tutors, Senior Managers and Managers are running for cover, at the very thought and mention of Functional Skills. I can see their faces screwed up in pain and loathing. However, this research study is designed to dispel a few myths surrounding Functional Skills, and to guide those new to Functional skills, and for those who are about to embark on the journey of teaching Functional Skills.

This research study is entitled the “Ups & Downs” of Functional Skills, and is appropriately named so. Those who teach Functional skills will agree, from the piloting of Functional Skills in 2009 until now it’s been an up and down journey. One minute you think that you have cracked it and everything looks rosy in the garden of Functional Skills, and then comes a new directive from upon high or the goal posts have shifted to accommodate a new strategy. These directives may be born through a lack of consultation and not operating at the coalface. The findings and recommendations from this research study suggest that learners have low levels of tolerance when it comes to the poor teaching of Functional Skills.

The findings and recommendations from this research study further suggest that educational organisations need to adopt a clear Functional Skills policy regarding the teaching and learning of Functional Skills. The recruitment and selection of Functional Skills staff is of paramount importance. Functional Skills tutors need to be able to teach active learning, as well as ensuring that that the learners see the relevance of Functional Skills, and that the Functional Skills tutors are working in collaboration with the vocational tutors and that Functional Skills is contextualised and embedded into the Curriculum.

For some managers the penny will drop, Functional Skills is not going away, not for now, it’s here to stay. Until the government of the day devise an alternative national strategy and policies for literacy and numeracy, we are stuck with Functional Skills. Under the new Ofsted inspection framework English and maths is now a major criteria that has to be met. Educational organisations need to be ready, they need to embrace Functional Skills, otherwise they face many years of “Ups and Downs”

## Introduction

This research study is based on a previous study carried out by Tinyan-Akin – Omoyajowo, the research study was funded by LSIS and supported by SUNCETT. The aim of the original study was to: Uncover and explore ways to change learners' impassive attitudes and disengagement with LLN classes: by exploring different models of promoting and delivering LLN, identifying effective strategies to increase the opportunities to enhance teaching, learning and retention amongst young learners at the East England College, while developing their LLN skills and to make recommendations based on the study findings.

The aim of this study builds upon and evaluates a previous intervention study in the field of collaborative curriculum planning and teaching. The objectives of this study were as followed:

- Appraise the effectiveness of the changes and the approach to timetabling, enrolment, collaborative working and supporting 16-18 year olds.
- Explore the effect of collaborative planning and teaching of the curriculum between vocational and Functional Skills tutors on the teaching of Functional Skills.
- Investigate the achievement, success and retention of Functional Skills teaching.

The study will be achieved by adapting the following methods:

- Evaluating the methods of promoting the importance of English & maths to the learners
- Monitor the collaboration of planning, teaching of the curriculum between vocational and Functional Skills tutors.
- Evaluate the collaboration between vocational and Functional Skills tutors on learner's attendance, engagement and retention.

The data collection for this research study was undertaken using various methods. To measure the timeline of the study a Gantt Chart was produced to enable the researcher to monitor, measure and track the study, and to help the researcher deliver the study on time as predicted and planned at the start of the research study.

The researcher has selected to use learner forums to capture data, the data captured from feedback sheets completed by learners and Functional Skills specialists. The data captured from the forums was used to generate charts & graphs that appear in the final research study, as well as data that supported the researchers' findings. Feedback from lesson observations was used to capture data from learners and Functional Skills Specialist. The data collected was then analysed in order to inform the research findings. The data analysis methods used was deductive and quantitative, these methods are in line with this research study. This research study is supported by researching various sources, this includes some of the leading figures in education e.g. Bruner, J. Piaget, J. Coffield, F. NIACE.

### **What is the impact of the introduction of new strategies on the teaching and learning of Functional Skills?**

#### **Is Functional Skills working successfully in an East England College?**

The answer is more complex than a simplistic response. East England College is a medium to large college situated or located in what the Government label as a "socially deprived" area. As seen in these recent government figures:-

<b>Barking &amp; Dagenham Statistics 2011-2012</b>	Supplied by <a href="http://www.Nomisweb.co.uk">www. Nomisweb.co.uk</a>
Population	187,000
In Employment	76,000
Unemployed	10,900
Population on benefit-Jobseekers allowance	6.2% compared to London 4.0%
Economic inactive	27.8% compared to London 24.5%
Qualifications NVQ level 2 and above	59% compared to London 71.4%

We have seen the coming and going of Key Skills, which was introduced in 2000 and was, phased out in 2009/2010. East England College piloted Functional Skills in 2009/2010 with a small group of ICT Level 2 learners on a BTEC Higher Diploma. The pilot was highly successful as it was carried out on a handpicked group of high achieving learners. The following year Functional Skills was rolled out across the college. However, with the lessons learnt from the introduction of key skills in 2000, all Functional Skills learners were entered at entry level or level one (most capable learners). During that period the Functional Skill lessons were delivered by the vocational tutor.

In 2011/2012 learners were entered for their Functional Skills at their initial assessment result level (Entry 1, 2, 3 – Level 1 & 2). The other significant change was that Functional Skills specialists in English and maths were employed and deployed in the various vocational areas e.g. Motor Vehicles, Business, Care, and Construction. It was during that period that an employee (Manager in the Adult Basic Skills Dept.) completed a research study on Functional Skills. The recommendations of the study were as followed:

- Point of Entry
- Timetabling
- Working as a team – presenting a united front
- Supporting learners

The aim of this study is to build upon and evaluate the previous Intervention study in the field of collaborative curriculum planning and teaching. The objective of this study was to appraise the effectiveness of the changes and approach to timetabling enrolment and supporting 16-18 year olds.

## Literature Review

In order to validate this research study it's essential that we review and identify key concepts, issues and themes that structure this investigation and the key academic ideas and concepts behind this investigation. At the heart of this research study we will hear the learner's voice and teachers calling for dedicated English and maths teachers. We will read that learner's and teachers demanding dedicated classrooms. This research study will support the need for static rooms, so that teaching resources are all in one place and available to all learners as stated by Putwain:

*"The role of the teacher in the Piagetian classroom, therefore is not didactic one where the teacher disseminates expert knowledge to the novice pupil but the creation and management of a learning environment designed to promote discovery"*

Putwain (2002, pp.1)

This research report has identified the lack of resources available to the learners i.e. rulers, calculators, dictionaries, are the basic tools required to teach English and Maths.

This research study will also highlight the lack of classroom management, demonstrated in the sample for this research study. Evidence will show that poor classroom management has a very negative effect on teaching and learning of Functional Skills. The main area of this research is in the collaboration between the vocational staff and the Functional Skills teaching staff. We have seen from a previous research study by the Curriculum Manager at a college in East England, that learners were feeling disengaged, lacking motivation and didn't see the relevance of Functional Skills. Jerome Bruner when discussing collaboration states *"The cultural contexts that favour mental development are principally and inevitably interpersonal for they involve symbolic exchanges and include a variety of joint enterprises with peers, parents and teacher. Thorough such collaboration the developing child gains access to the resources. The symbol system and even the technology of the culture"* Bruner (1996, pp.68) This report will highlight the need for vocational staff to buy into the philosophy, culture and principles of Functional Skills in order to get learners on board and engaged as stated by Bruner. It will need the help of parents, senior management, staff, and support staff to embed Functional Skills into the curriculum.

As discussed at the start of this study, the East England College sits in a socially deprived area. In order to develop learners with good vocational skills and good LLN skills so they can compete in the national and global market Bruner suggests:

*"Is not simply a renewal of the skills that make a country a better competitor in the world markets but a renewal and reconsideration of what I have called school culture" I have tried to characterize the new idea as creating communities of learners. Indeed, on the basis of what we have learned in recent years about human learning, that it is best when it is participatory, proactive, communal, collaborative and given over to constructing meanings rather than receding them". Bruner (1996, pp. 84)*

Bruner a leading educational theorist supports the need for collaboration in teaching and learning as does Professor Frank Coffield, who supports Bruner's argument by stating *"We are witnessing the main tensions within the sector being played out in the professional lives of staff i.e. Those between competition and collaboration between standardisation and innovations, between centralisation and local flexibility, between enabling and controlling strategies and between long term sustainability and short term goals and targets"*.Coffield (2013.pp.24)

As Professor Coffield points out, there is great pressure on colleges, management and staff to achieve targets laid down by the government, at times unrealistic targets in some socially deprived and challenging areas. However, Bruner and Coffield both acknowledge the need for collaboration in teaching and learning. It is essential the vocational teachers and Functional Skills specialist communicate with each other, if we are to make Functional Skills relevant to the learner. However, there is also a need for a re-think on the way we teach and how our learners learn. Kolb states that

*"Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience"* Kolb (2002, pp.38)

This research study and previous research studies have identified that bad experiences at school learning LLN, have contributed partly to the poor success of Functional Skills and the engaging of learners in Functional Skills. Petty takes a different approach on learning by stating:

*"Learning is not the same as remembering it is an active meaning making process. Only information that has been structured and organised by the student can pass into the long-term memory and can be used in real life. This organisation process is helped by doing rather than listening"* Petty (2009, pp. 22)

This interesting observation made by Petty is that he associates learning with "doing" His research study findings supports his claim that learners best learn when taking part in active learning which is the ethos behind Functional Skills, working on those practical skills. Carol Taylor the Director Research and Development, states that *"English (and Maths) needs to reflect the everyday real live concerns of adults and that the skills learners needed were not narrow but wide and deep and transferable to other domains of life"* Taylor (2012 pp.4)

The findings from this report will highlight that many teachers, staff and learners are not recognising the link between their vocational domain success and Functional Skills. As Carol Taylor points out success in Functional Skills will enhance success in other domains of life. This concept is further re-enforced by Karen Adriaanse from OFSTED when she states

*"At OFSTED we therefore welcome the fact that Functional Skills requires learners to apply skills in English hand Mathematics in everyday contexts"* Adriaanse (2012. Pp.12)

The findings from this RDF research study will highlight that some learners are struggling with Functional Skills maths, whether it be the teacher, the teachers' style or both, motivation or other reasons as stated by Steve Chin:

*"Maths usually in the shape of numbers causes anxiety and denial (I never was any good at maths) way beyond any other school subject. Yet the need to use maths lingers long after schooling has finished. It is a part of our everyday life"*

Chin (2011. pp. 1)

This observation is supported by Martinez & Williams who argue that maths when quoting the research findings of (Nard & Steward 2003) showed that an increasing number of mathematics students at school follow a profile of quiet disaffection with the subject. That includes tedium, isolation, rote learning, elitism and depersonalisation. (Martinez and Williams, 2011)

There appears to be resistance by learners and teachers of Functional Skills maths and to some extent English. However research findings suggest that teachers need to adapt different ways of teaching and engaging learners one of the areas that needs to be developed is motivation. Motivation is regarded by experienced and inexperienced teachers alike as a prerequisite for effective learning and the greatest challenge that many teachers face is to make their students want to learn. If students do not want to learn their learning efficiency will be so low that they may learn virtually nothing. If you know how to motivate students you can highly increase their learning rate (Petty, 2009 pp.44). Motivating learners is generally regarded as difficult when teaching Functional Skills. However, when vocational staff and Functional Skills tutors collaborate, results predict that it has a positive effect on teaching and learning of Functional Skills. The findings from this study suggest that learners, tutors and managers at all levels of the organisation need to see the relevance of Functional Skills.

Another area highlighted by the findings of this study, is classroom management and the quality of the teacher. It is clear from this research study that classroom management for many Functional Skills teachers is an issue with the constant changing of staff (who are mainly agency workers).

In some classes the lack of continuity in teaching has had a damaging effect on classroom management, as stated by Petty:

*"Why should you feel shy or apologetic about the use of the teacher's formal authority, if you are using it for the students benefit"? You are there to teach and cannot teach without order; use your authority"* Petty (2009, pp. 98)

It is apparent from this research report that many Functional Skills teachers don't know or understand that power of authority Petty goes on to state:

*"Students will only accept your authority if you apply it with confidence. However, you will only begin to feel confident when they accept your authority. An unfortunate catch 22. You never get a second change to make a first impression".* Petty (2009, pp.98)

The findings from this study has identified that some learners found the work easy, simple, and even baby like. This then lead to some learners being disruptive during the lesson, which is then compounded by poor classroom management. "If students are bored because their work is too simple, no amount of juggling of rewards and punishments will solve the problem" (Petty 2009, pp.110)

"Even if vigilance and theoretical punishments keep the behaviour within tolerable limits, the problem is likely to resurface in a new guise, which may well be even more difficult to deal with" (Petty 2009, pp.110). The findings from this study has highlighted that many learners find the work simple. Petty goes on to say, "If the root cause of the problem is inappropriate work, then the solution is obvious. Unhappily, the diagnosis of behaviour problems is sometimes very difficult and occasionally impossible" (Petty, 2009, pp.110).

Colleges that teach Functional Skills require full time teachers that are fully equipped teachers as stated by Frank Coffield:

*"In terms of teaching and learning the cultural approach does not limit itself to a number of specific targets such as retention and attainment of students. Rather, the general aim is for learners, tutors, managers, and institutions the sector and the education system itself to get better at teaching and learning; and that means that at each of these levels there is a need for expertise in teaching and learning. Research into the delivery of Functional Skills has highlighted the need for teachers that are qualified and competent at what they're doing"* Coffield (2008 pp. 17)

This view is further endorsed by Toni Fazaeli the chief executive of the Institute for Learning who states:

*"It is clear that teachers and trainers will need already to have good levels of Functional Skills themselves and it is vital that they have good support to develop effective teaching practice for Functional Skills"* Fazaeli (2012 pp. 14)

The findings from this research study support in principle the work of Coffield, Petty and Kolb. However, the three leading educationalists have omitted from their work one of the main ingredients of a good teacher, “character”. The feedback captured from the focus groups and interviews all refer to the tutor’s personality and the competence of teachers who for them English is their second language. These Subjects are swept under the carpet. It is the elephant in the room scenario but no one is prepared to discuss these issues for fear of reprisals and persecution.

This argument is highlighted by Carr when he states:

*“Many perfectly admirable and well intentioned people may be ineffective teachers precisely because they are by nature or formation dull, humourless or lethargic people or perhaps, because they have irritating and/or readily imitable mannerisms”*

Carr (2003, pp.28)

David Carr’s statement covers a multitude of sins. However, it is an issue that cannot be avoided and requires further investigation.

## Methodology

This research study evaluates the methods of promoting the importance of English and Maths. In order to capture the learner's response to Functional Skills, a classroom activity was used to capture data for analysis. To support the findings of this research study at the East London College, the researcher informed the teaching staff that they would be collecting data and feedback from learners in their teaching areas. The feedback gathered was captured from sixty learners. Two groups were selected on the basis that Functional Skills was embedded into the curriculum. One group was a level 1 Beauty group consisting of all girls aged 16-18 year olds. The other was a group of Graphic Media learner's aged 16-18 year olds. The other two groups were Public Services and a Beauty groups made up of girls and boys aged 16-18 year olds. The Tutor was then asked to leave the room so that the learners could answer and ask questions without fear of reprisals. The researcher assured each group that the information gathered wouldn't be shared with the tutors at this point and that the data and information collected was for research purposes only.

However, the findings will be shared with senior management in the near future. Classes were split into groups of two or three and in some cases groups of four. The learners were then asked to write comments and statements down on a flip chart piece of paper, once the task was finished a group discussion took place about Functional Skills. Typical questions that arose from the short group discussion are listed below:

- Has streaming lessons made a difference from last years' Functional Skills lessons?
- Is there more active learning this year?
- What could we do differently to make the lesson more enjoyable?
- Do you enjoy Functional Skills? If not, why not?
- General comments about Functional Skills

The learners were constantly reassured throughout the session that the feedback and comments made, were done in the strictest of confidence. Some learners wanted to make personal comments, the researcher explained to the groups that it wasn't a forum to attack individual tutors. However, if the learner felt that strongly about a particular tutor and it was hindering their progress in Functional Skills, then it needed to be recorded on the feedback sheets.

The selection of the groups recording the feedback was not selected in any order. In some groups the learners picked their own groups, in others it was formed from established working groups. There was no limit to the size of the groups as long as the groups were not larger than four learners as Geoff Petty states:

*"The greater the confidence the group will have in its findings and the more likely it will be to challenge the tutors opinions, the more likely it is that the groups will interpret the task correctly"* Petty (2009, pp.242) The information and feedback captured by the learners was gained without bias or overt pressure.

## **The problems faced when delivering Functional Skills**

Functional Skills superseded Key Skills, and since the introduction of Functional Skills, schools and colleges have struggled to successfully embed Functional Skills into the curriculum. East England College first piloted Functional Skills English, Maths and ICT level 2 in 2009-2010. The pilot was carried out on a small group of ICT learners. Although the results were 100% success. This was due to a handpicked group of fifteen learners on a BTEC Higher Diploma Course. The following year Functional Skills was then rolled out cross college. The learners were taught Functional Skills by the vocational tutor within the learner's vocational area. Learners taking Functional Skills were registered at Entry 3 level cross college, and on rare occasions depending on the learner's previous qualification, put on Functional Skills level 1. The results at the end of the year were not encouraging, 63% success rate compared with the national average of 68%. Although there were some administration errors gathering and processing of the results (some results may have gone adrift) the overall verdict was that Functional Skills needed to be a restructured.

### **The problem**

To improve and enhance the teaching and learning of Functional Skills the following academic year, three Functional Skills managers were employed full time in the vocational areas. The college then assigned Functional Skills specialists within the different vocational areas. Regular Functional Skills meetings and training was provided. Specialised workshops were set up so that Functional Skills specialists and vocational tutors could collaborate, share good practice and resources. The collaboration between vocational tutors and Functional Skills Specialist also encouraged the embedding of Functional Skills into the schemes of work where they naturally occur. There were also changes to the timetables. Functional Skills was embedded into the learner's timetable, not the first lesson of the day or the last lesson of the day. The college was finding that learners were skipping the first lesson of the day if it was Functional Skills and disappearing before the last lesson of the day if it was Functional Skills.

Due to lack of experienced Functional Skills teachers, the college employed agency staff cross college. This led to a quick turn over of agency staff due to different circumstances which will be discussed later in this study. However, the constant changing of agency staff resulted in a lack of teaching continuity and consistency. This led to a lack of trust, faith and good behaviour by some learners towards their Functional Skills teacher. Some staff demonstrated a negative approach towards the Functional Skills team. Another problem that needed to be addressed was the lack of control and management within the Exams department. Functional Skills results and how the results were gathered lacked cohesion. One of the main issues at the college was the lack of resources. There were no dedicated English and Maths classrooms. No exercise books, an out dated VLE webpage for Functional Skills, no Functional Skills learner handbooks, and no props available i.e. rulers, calculators, dictionaries, all the basic tools required to teach English and Maths.

One of the main problems was learners and staff apathy and attitude towards Functional Skills. The feedback from the learners was that Functional Skills felt like they were back at school. The work was for “babies” or too easy, and not relevant to their vocational subject. Many teaching staff saw Functional Skills as a distraction to their learner’s main vocational course. Therefore Functional Skills lacked any importance, and was treated by managers as a nuisance and a pain when it came to timetabling. Functional Skills in some instances ended up being timetabled at the end of the day, either during the college wide meeting slot on a Wednesday afternoon or timetabled during the dreaded graveyard shift, late on a Friday afternoon.

The researcher’s first course of action was to create a draft poster. This would help to formulate ideas and set up a course of action. The researcher then spent several sessions with the Curriculum Manager for Functional Skills at the East London College. The meetings were set up to discuss the aims and objectives of this research study. During the time spent with the Manager, an action plan was formulated. The action plan put in place was designed to get the research study up and running to an agreed timescale. Both parties discussed and agreed on what research information and background reading needed to be undertaken. The next plan of action was to decide what groups of learners would be suitable to gather the required data for the research analysis findings.

The Curriculum Manager and the researcher in January 2013 discussed and agreed on the aims and objectives of the research study and agreed on the methodology. The Manager suggested a selection of articles and books to read. The researcher then created a Gantt Chart to monitor the timescale of the study. The Gantt Chart was produced using MS Excel. The Researcher then used MS Word to edit the research poster. It was in March 2013 that the researcher used a selection of learner focus groups to collect the research data. The groups interviewed were full time 16-18 year old learners. The research investigation was carried out during what would have been the learners Functional Skills lesson. The next step was to write up and prepare the research study.

## Ethics in Research

The researcher for this study has fully embraced the BERA 2004 ethical guidelines. The name of college has been changed to protect the researcher's sources of information. The research conducted has been shared with students, staff and senior management at this college.

In the writing of this research study, the people and persons interviewed or questioned have all agreed to take part in the research with full knowledge and disclosure by the researcher on the content and purpose of this research project and that no one has been harmed in this research (Coffied F 2013), (Hutchinson 2013 pp20)

- Children vulnerable young people and vulnerable adults
- Right to withdraw
- Privacy, confident, trust

During the collection of feedback data with the focus groups, the researcher was fully aware of their need to stay impartial and subjective. During research study it's far too easy for the researcher to get personally and emotionally attached to the subject and process. As a researcher it's vital that the researcher takes into consideration emotional labour. This is to say that when in the process of interviewing and addressing focus groups, gathering information and data, the researcher doesn't display visible facial and body messages. These messages need to be suppressed so that their emotions conform to a social norm; otherwise the research data collected could be influenced and tainted in the researchers favour. Emotional labour was first coined by Arlie Hochschild 1983 in her book "The Managed Heart".

This theory is further supported by Lucy Jarzabkowsi from Murdoch University *"where the emotional dimensions of conducting research require a person actively to manage their emotions in front of participants in a way that will present a more acceptable response, emotional labour is performed"* Jarzabkowsi (2012, pp.10) . The ethical dilemma for the researcher was to stand in front of focus groups listening to feedback about colleagues and other staff, while still keeping their emotions in check and conducting the sessions in a professional manner

The researcher made it very clear to all groups that took part in this research study, their right to privacy and anonymity. "Privacy is more than simple confidentiality" The right to privacy means that a person has the right not to take part in the research, not to answer questions, not to be interviewed, not to have their home intruded into, not to answer telephones or emails and to engage in private behaviour in their own private place without fear of being observed" Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2011, pp.91). No learner that participated in the focus groups is referred to by name or by any other means of identification as stated by Cohen, Manion & Morrison *"Anonymity is not using the names of the participants or any other personal means of identification"*. Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2011, pp.91)

## **Main findings**

### **What the learners said in the focus groups:**

The learners interviewed by the researcher commented that they all knew what to do during the lesson, and understood the task set. One learner stated that they knew what to do, and they were happy, and understood the workshop task. Another learner was happy and confident with the work and the task set during the workshop. One learner said she knew what to do, but needed prompting and encouragement and was pleased to be at the workshop.

Many of the learners asked, knew what to do during the workshop. One learner knew what his Functional Skills level was, and knew what the task was and how to do it. Another learner was happy and knew what to do during the English workshop. One learner wasn't sure what to do, however, he was happy, and thought that the workshop was a good idea, and was sure that it would help him

### **Student Focus Group Feedback - Main strengths & areas for development**

The main strengths and areas for development have been identified from a series of Level 2 focus groups held between 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2013 and 6<sup>th</sup> February 2013. The focus groups were in the curriculum areas of Beauty, Business, Child Care, Electrical, Media, Motor Sport and Sports.

#### **Strengths**

The reading, writing and spelling, group work, the learners liked interactive lessons.

“Our tutor is good but there's only so much she can do if she's trying to help everyone at once- and we all have different needs”

“If you haven't got a GCSE in Maths or English, Functional Skills will help”

“I must say that I am quite pleased with your style of teaching. The manner in which you present your material is quite brilliant. I learn something in every class. I am quite enjoying letter writing”.

#### **Areas for development**

“Timetabling and breaks”

“The time lessons starts and the way we get split up into groups and everything sometimes gets confusing”

“The maths teacher is not teaching us. Not getting prepared for our exams I feel that the teachers do their best to control the class but sometimes it becomes impossible for them”.

## What the tutors said

### Workshop Feedback – Review Week

I felt the main positive points were the opportunity to assess ability of students and see their understanding of exam tasks in a workshop environment. This was a real eye opener where students said they had a C in GCSE and were low ability on tests, also those with comprehension issues and poor writing skills. In this respect the workshops were an absolute necessity.

Quite clearly there is a dire need for more of these workshops in the run up to the exams. Maybe it is possible to incorporate these into a regular feature?  
Hope this helps. (Functional Skills Specialist 2013)



Fig. 1

“Thank you for making their Functional Skills more relevant structured & benefit (than I experienced last year)” (Beauty Tutor, 2013)

Just wanted to advise you of the positive feedback I received from Childcare students after a Functional Skills Maths lesson. The lesson took place on 15th February in A209, between 10am and 12pm. The tutors were Ms X and Mr X (please excuse me if I have misspelt their names). All students were focused and engaged throughout the lesson and learning took place. The students asked if all their maths lessons workshops could be taught the same way. (LSP, 2013)

- “Streaming helped me to target the group more effectively in terms of lesson planning and ‘pitching’ the content and they did acknowledge such a positive development”
- “My plumbing students embraced the idea of streaming. There is a small core of students who are attending and being fully engaged in the lessons”
- “As far my *own* electrical group is concerned, my learners have been fairly regular and have done well so far” <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Please note all comments on page 18 are direct quotes. However, the contributor’s name has been changed to protect their identity.

## Recommendations

To support and prepare the learners it's necessary that all full time and part time learners complete an initial assessment within the first three weeks of the new academic year. This is to ensure that the learners are working at the appropriate level in line with their skills set and ability. Speaking and listening Functional Skills unit, to be completed within the first three weeks of the new academic year.

Promote and facilitate the collaboration between vocational staff and Functional Skills Specialist as to the teaching of Functional Skills, it is essential that we reduce the contact time for Functional Skills Specialist to 18 hours. The Functional Skills Specialist will be expected to attend staff meetings in their vocational area. The expectation is that vocational staff and Functional Skills tutors attend regular collaboration meetings and workshops.

In order to engage and keep the learners focused there is a need to Introduce and adopt strategies for active learning. The organisation needs to provide in house CPD & JPD training for active learning, as well as working with outside agencies e.g. LSIS and the FE Guild, City & Guilds and BSKB in delivering training for all tutors teaching Functional Skills.

In order to meet the staffing requirements in all areas of the organisation a team approach to the recruitment of Functional Skills Specialist's is necessary. The Functional Skills management team need to collaborate in the recruitment of Functional Skills staff through-out the whole process

Roll out streaming/banding cross college from September 2013. College wide approach to timetabling, therefore Functional Skills must not be timetabled as the first lesson of the day or the last lesson of the day. Wednesday afternoon is to be kept clear for cross college staff meetings and training. Dedicated rooms allocated for Functional Skills with suitable resources housed in these rooms e.g. dictionaries, calculators, and maths props.

Learners with a GCSE C-A or a Functional Skills level 2 qualification are required to attend GCSE lessons to improve their grade by one level only. Learners with a A\* or learners selected by their vocational area will be required to sit a tailored qualification, e.g. Business sector learners will be expected to attend a "Data Management unit" (a higher level maths unit)

Create a Functional Skills internal VLE webpage for learners and teaching staff. The webpage on the VLE will offer the following facilities, forums, quizzes, blogging, resources, learner voice feedback and an area for support and guidance.

Promote Functional Skills so that it is embedded into the college documentation, and is clearly visible at enrolment events, open days, inserted into college advertising campaigns, promotional leaflets and flyers.

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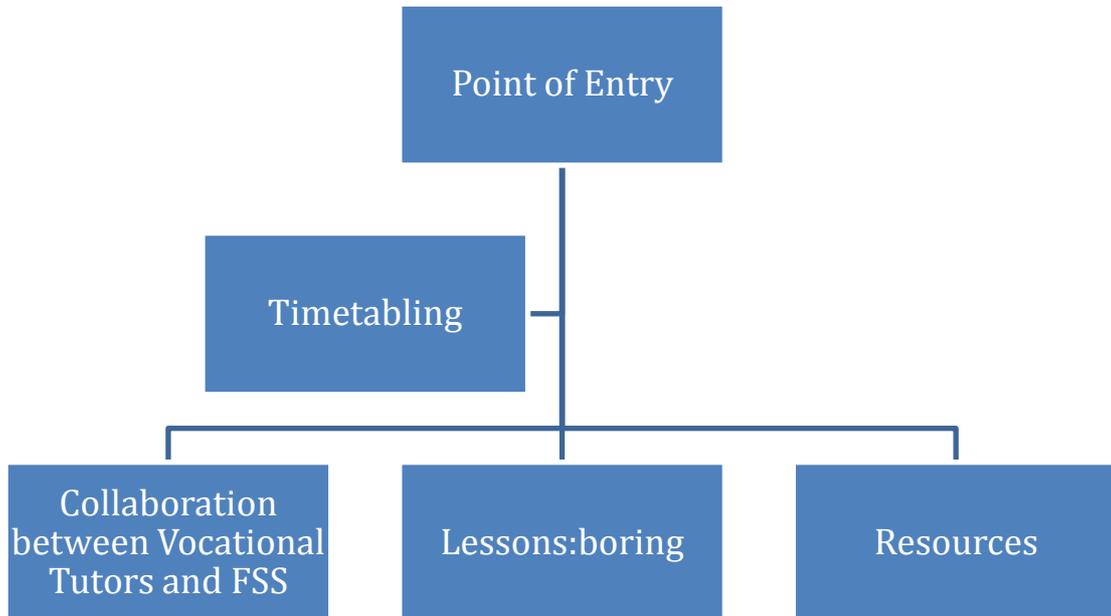
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## Appendices



Recommendations from the previous intervention study in the field of collaborative curriculum planning and delivery Fig 2.

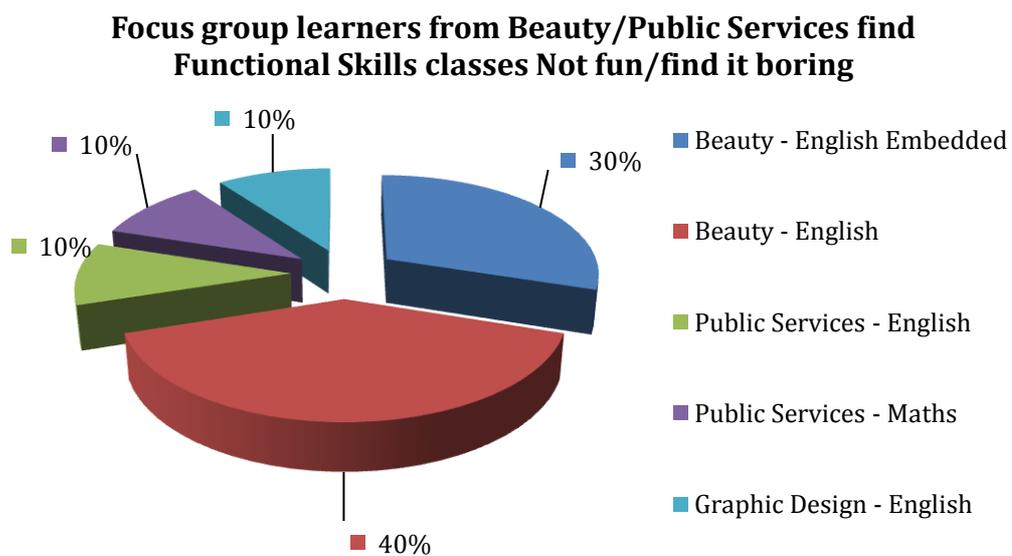


Fig 3

**Whole organisational approach strategy for learners with GCSE English and maths grade A\* - C or Functional Skills level 2 chart.**

See diagram below: Fig.4

