

Skills for Life, basic skills, key skills, functional skills – what’s the difference?

Defining literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) in the National Teaching and Learning Change Programme resources

A variety of different terms are used in education and training to refer to the important literacy, language and numeracy skills that are needed in everyday life and learning. The terms have evolved over time during the development of the skills and qualifications framework and are used by teachers in different contexts.

These resources are intended to address a wide audience and, to ensure a shared understanding, these resources use the term ‘literacy, language and numeracy (LLN)’ to include:

- basic skills – adult literacy and numeracy
- English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
- key skills– communication, application of number
- GCSE English and mathematics
- functional skills – English and mathematics
- Skills for Life.

Adult literacy and numeracy standards

In these resources we refer to the national standards for adult literacy and numeracy to show how LLN skills might be embedded in learning activities. We are using these standards because they:

- form the basic building blocks of all the other literacy, language and numeracy qualifications
- are supported by core curricula which are valuable resources for teachers.

The adult literacy and numeracy standards define the range of skills and capabilities that adults need to function and progress at work and in society. Adult literacy and numeracy is described as:

“...the ability to read, write and speak in English and to use mathematics at a level necessary to function at work and in society in general.”

The adult literacy and numeracy core curricula are valuable to teachers as they describe exactly what needs to be learned and include examples of useful teaching strategies. The curricula help teachers to select and teach skills appropriate to learners’ needs and can be downloaded from:

www.dfes.gov.uk/curriculum_literacy/ **Adult literacy core curriculum**

www.dfes.gov.uk/curriculum_numeracy/ **Adult numeracy core curriculum**

Key skills standards

Teachers and learners following vocational programmes may be more familiar with key skills, Communication and Application of number. The term 'embedded' or 'integrated' learning in a vocational context commonly refers to key skills. The key skills standards describe the skills learners need to develop in order to achieve the qualification and can be downloaded from www.qca.org.uk/qca_6455.aspx

The relationship between the two sets of standards

The two sets of standards are designed to complement and support each other.

At Levels 1 and 2, the adult literacy and numeracy standards and Part A of the key skills standards for Communication and Application of number describe the same communication and number skills, and the national tests are the same for both sets of standards.

The adult literacy and numeracy standards provide the underpinning knowledge, techniques and understanding for the equivalent key skill. They are the 'lowest common denominator' and act as flexible 'building blocks' for key skills (and functional skills). They are particularly helpful to vocational teachers in describing very specifically the skills that learners need to achieve at each level, whatever the qualification aim.

Functional skills

These are practical skills in English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT). They help you gain the most out of work, education and everyday life and the qualifications will be widely available following a three-year pilot programme which began in September 2007. The full qualifications will be introduced for first teaching in 2010. During the pilot phase, it is likely that there will be changes made to the standards so they cannot be used reliably for reference in activities in the short term.

Skills for Life

Skills for Life is the national strategy to improve the literacy, language (ESOL) and numeracy skills of adults. The Skills for Life Improvement Programme is helping to deliver the Skills for Life strategy through:

- innovative teaching and learning
- whole organisation approach
- professional development.

The focus of the Improvement Programme is on improving the quality of the learner's experience and on improving teaching and learning. You can access the Programme's website at: www.sflip.org.uk