



Association of
Employment and Learning
Providers

AELP Submission: #55

**Making the Functional Skills
Reform a Success**

Over the past 2 years, AELP has been told there will be no policy or funding change in relation to Functional Skills until the new curriculum and assessment is introduced.

With major reforms to Functional Skills due to come into effect in late 2019, now is the time to consider a number of factors that need to be addressed to ultimately ensure these qualifications can be delivered as they are so critical in improving the social mobility of the learners who do not yet hold a level 2 qualification in maths and English. With any type of reform, the recent past highlights that meaningful and well-meaning policy changes can be significantly hampered by poor implementation or funding.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

1. Removal of the compulsory GCSE re-sit policy, instead, allowing those without maths and English to take functional skills as a robust alternative where appropriate.
2. Funding rates for functional skills within apprenticeships to be aligned with the standalone rates paid for all other learners.
3. AELP is calling for functional skills training to be included as part of the 20% off-the-job training time within an apprenticeship.
4. Greater support to be given to the development of the provider workforce to support this transition to the new functional skills curriculum and assessment.

RESITS

Recent GCSE re-sit results show the policy of compulsory retaking GCSE English and maths is failing our students. Those aged 17-plus taking GCSE maths, only 22.7% achieved a Grade 4 or higher- a decline of 4.3% compared to 2017. Meanwhile, students aged 17-plus resitting GCSE English, 33.1% achieved a grade 4 or higher- down 2.4% compared to 2017. With the reformation of functional skills, having both a new curriculum and assessment process, they should be offered as a suitable option for those who fail their GCSEs.

Maths and English- along with digital are skills for life which are essential for economic and social participation in society. The policy of compulsory GCSE re-sits is setting up young people to repeatedly fail over and over again, therefore,

ACTION: AELP is calling for the removal of the compulsory GCSE re-sit policy, instead, allowing those without maths and English to take functional skills as a robust alternative where appropriate. The most appropriate route can be determined by a robust initial assessment of each learner, taking into consideration their main programme of study.

FUNDING

Reformed functional skills will be implemented from 2019 and are designed to be robust for learners and credible with employers. As noted in the government's consultation response on functional skills reform, *'they support the delivery of our Industrial Strategy ambitions to build a world-class technical education system and ensure that everyone can improve their skills throughout their lives.'*

Given the changes being ushered in next year, now is time to evaluate the true cost of delivering the new functional skills curriculum to ensure they are appropriately funded as this is currently not the case. We are concerned that the current funding rate of £471 per subject is almost 50% less than the stand-alone rate for the same programme for no rational reason. Not one official has been able to justify why this rate has been set so low for apprentices who often need the most support. Even the standalone rate at £724 is incurring financial losses in delivery that increases with each level studied.

Our research highlights the funding allocated to functional skills does not cover the costs of supporting a learner. With the more challenging curriculum and assessment, the lower funding is even more inappropriate. This disincentives providers to recruit apprentices who require maths and English and will continue to do so as the funding bands on apprenticeships are revised by the IfA. Limited support of maths and English delivery in Apprenticeships will not only be a barrier to starts but also is bound to reduce the level of success of the maths and English and therefore the apprenticeships' success overall.

	Variance from standalone funding (£724)	Variance from Apprenticeship funding (£471)	Range	Number of responses
Entry Level 2 Functional Skills	£574	£321	£81-£2400	12
Entry Level 3 Functional Skills	£534	£281	£110-£1960	12
Level 1 Functional Skills	-£45	-£298	£170-£1800	31*
Level 2 Functional Skills	-£72	-£325	£400-£2200	38
Level 3 and above in Functional Skills	-£242	-£495	£400-£1500	3

AELP believes maths and English provision will play a central part in the success of the government's productivity and industrial strategies. Therefore, functional skills should have equivalent standing to GCSEs

ACTION: Funding rates for functional skills within apprenticeships be aligned with the standalone rates.

TRAINING TIME

Furthermore, candidates who do not possess functional skills are less attractive to employers especially as the delivery of the maths and English is not considered a part of 20% off-the-job training. As a result, the individual spends even more time away from productive work and on the job training. This will have a negative impact on the government's social mobility agenda.

ACTION: AELP is calling for functional skills training to be included as part of the 20% off-the-job training time within an apprenticeship.

CAPACITY TO DELIVER

With the delivery of the newly reformed functional skills fast approaching, it is important that support is given to the sector to strengthen capacity to ensure the new curriculum is delivered effectively. Programmes in the past that provided resources and training have proved incredibly beneficial to functional skills providers. In order to deliver the revised functional skills curriculum,

ACTION:

AELP is calling for greater support to be given to the development of the provider workforce to support this transition to the new functional skills curriculum and assessment.

About AELP

Members of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) support employers in the delivery of 75% of apprenticeships in England and they deliver other publicly funded skills and employment programmes through engagement with 380,000 employers. The majority of AELP's 900+ members are independent private, not-for-profit and voluntary sector training and employment services organisations with employers, universities, FE colleges, schools and end-point assessment organisations joining AELP in increasing numbers.

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