

OUTSTANDING TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

**FINAL REPORT ON THE OTLA PHASE 7 (ENGLISH) PROJECT –
ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING**

Essex ACL

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For further information regarding the OTLA Phase 7 (English) programme and this project go to <https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/>.

The programme was delivered on behalf of the Education and Training Foundation by -



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Final report - Assessment for Learning

Essex ACL

This project will demonstrate the process to create a new online initial assessment tool to be used independently with all maths learners. We will share the challenges we identified and benefits of this process to both tutors and learners.

Summary

Our aim was to ensure that the assessment process used for GCSE and Functional Skills maths was fit for purpose. We wanted to engage the learners from the beginning and encourage them to evaluate their own starting point whilst also developing a process which was streamlined and timesaving for staff.

Essex ACL supports adults across the whole county of Essex in nine main centres and other outreach sites. Our ethos is to 'improve lives through learning'. ACL works with adults over the age of 19 in the main but also has apprentices under 19. We deliver English and maths across the whole county from GCSE to pre-entry level. In the current climate all delivery has moved to online but, in the future, will return to both classroom and online learning. Initially the project involved maths tutors and learners but, following successes, has now included stakeholders from other curriculum areas.

Rationale

We found no suitable pre-course assessment for reform maths Functional Skills qualifications. Essex ACL previously used BKSB which, although a very well packaged resource, we felt did not meet our needs following changes to their reform assessment package. It had become far too fluid and did not allow the overriding of levels. For lower-level learners the initial questions could be too hard which could cause an initial dip in confidence and therefore lack of engagement. None of the awarding organisations at the time had updated assessment materials and other providers in the region had commented on the lack of suitable assessment materials also.

Our Functional Skills tutors previously completed assessments for both Maths and English which caused some issues with interpreting results and therefore signposting learners to the correct class. Learners in an incorrect class are unlikely to engage with learning which could be too difficult and this can therefore, effect retention and the learner's success.

The Covid-19 situation meant all centres closed and so ACL needed to have the ability to assess learners remotely in order to signpost them to an appropriate class. This meant any resource developed needed to be compatible with online platforms and also classroom delivery in the future. A version was created, however feedback from tutors identified that whilst the content of the initial assessment was appropriate, it was a labour-intensive process from the perspective of the tutor and

also resulted in poor attendance. This links to Ofsted's assertion in the EIF note "Leaders understand the limitations of assessment and do not use it in a way that creates unnecessary burdens for staff or learners" (Ofsted 2021). We, therefore, wanted to improve this process.

Approach

After feedback from the tutors, it became apparent that the tools we already had in place were working well but that the initial assessment was extremely time consuming. We therefore decided to focus on improving this. From tutor feedback and use of interactive tools, the initial assessment questions were adapted into a Microsoft Form. A previous barrier to assessments was learners requiring (and remembering) a log on. The Form was created with direct access which removed this barrier. Tutors evaluated the Form and marking guidelines then fed back any initial changes they thought could further improve this process (appendix 2). This was then trialled with a small cohort of learners who gave feedback (appendix 3).

The Form was amended to remove the scoring as this did not mean anything to the learner and we did not want them to feel demoralised. We also included other questions to support with future planning and to save further time for both tutor and learner.

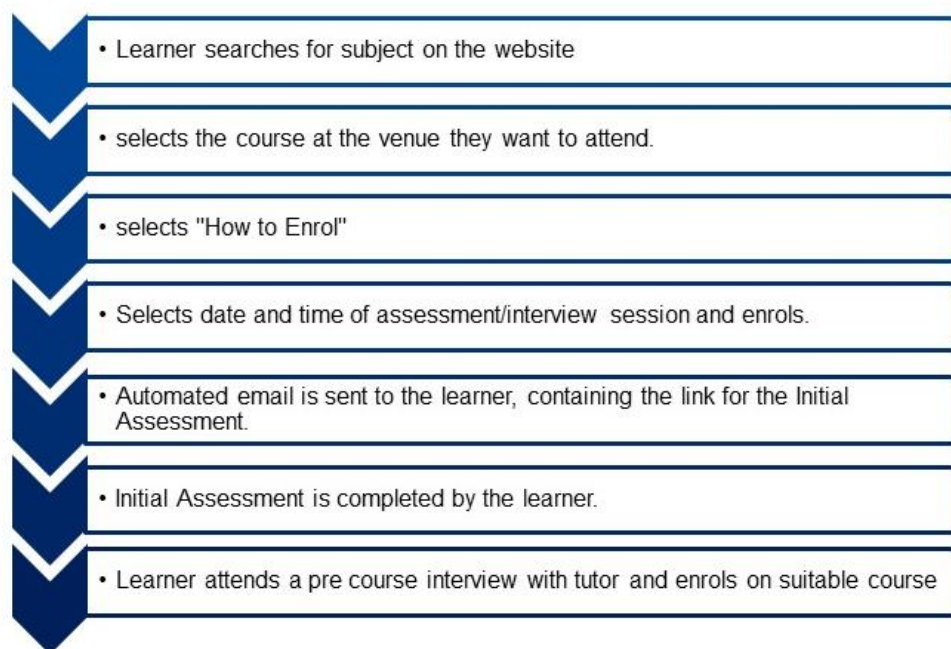


Figure 1: The learner journey

This process was then implemented for all learners enrolling on a maths course for the second cohort of the year. To date 329 learners have successfully completed the new Initial Assessment and have enrolled on a suitable course. Based on recent feedback received 96% learners who completed the IA went on to do the pre-course interview with a tutor. This was a vast increase to a previous attendance rate of approximately 55%.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

This project has now involved every maths tutor in Essex ACL across all 9 of our centres. Tutors have developed confidence in the assessment process as they are only assessing their own subject area and feel the assessment is valid and meets the needs of ACL learners. Tutors experience a less time intensive process and believe this benefits the learner as well. A tutor commented:

“You get a proper chance to chat with the learners and they have time to ask the questions they need to so that they can choose the most appropriate course for them. I also think because it is a proper 1:1 they feel more comfortable discussing any concerns or declaring any additional needs.”
(Appendix 4)

The tutors involved in this project have increased their digital skills and promoted the benefits of technology to their learners. It has given tutors an opportunity to see how a tool such as MS Forms can support formative and summative assessment within their classes and, as these can be shared across the team, further save time and develop a greater collaborative environment which was challenging due to lockdown. They have also been able to contribute to the wider organisational change by evaluating the process and giving feedback on improvements which can be made.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Following on from the success of this within the maths area, we have shared our challenges and successes with colleagues in English and ESOL who also had to amend their assessment practices due to the challenges brought about by Covid19. We have worked alongside our marketing, business development and MIS team to develop a more autonomous process for learners accessing assessments. We now have the opportunity on our website for all learners who wish to join one of these three curriculum areas to complete the assessment online in their own time and then be contacted for a pre-course interview. Already, at this early stage, the successful pilot has influenced the assessment process for newly launched qualifications in the Creative Industries. By following this method there has already been a noticeable increase in enrolments.

Across the wider sector, we have also shared our findings in maths network groups, both regionally and nationally, enabling other providers to gain from our experience. We have shared the process, pitfalls, positives and the impact this has had on our service.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Whilst it is too early to know the impact this change in initial assessment process has had on learner achievement, we have evidence that it has impacted their journey. Learner attendance on assessment sessions has increased significantly from 55% to 96% with 93% of learners surveyed commenting on the ease of accessing the assessment (appendix 4). We know that learners often find it daunting to come back to studying, especially a subject such as maths, using technology can help overcome this:

"Computer programs and apps have also been recommended for practising maths. One advantage of this approach is that computers offer a motivating, attractive and non-judgmental environment for practising some essential skills, and they can be used without the contribution of trained professionals."

(the conversation.com)

Therefore, this move to online assessment in an environment learners feel comfortable will be of benefit.

This has been shown in the improvement in our retention on courses from block 1 to block 2 showing how this has helped learners even with the challenge of learning remotely. Maths retention in the first block was already excellent at 94.3%, but since implementing the new assessment process it is now an outstanding 95.1%. Learner A comments "I found it all really easy. The tutor was lovely and I'm happily working through my course now".

We will continue to monitor learners' results and assess the impact this change in process has across other curriculum areas as they move to the same model.

Learning from this project

Eliminating the challenges we faced of a labour-intensive process and lack of suitable initial assessment materials have overall been highly successful and effective. These have brought about changes to our assessment processes which will now be implemented across the whole Service.

By using MS Forms for this process, it is very easy to make any changes to the assessment questions or format which means we can quickly adapt and adjust as necessary. We can use a new form per course or cohort as required and the results are easily accessible by anyone who requires the information whilst still meeting the requirements of GDPR.

Enabling learners the opportunity to access an initial assessment at a time which is convenient to them has removed some of the previous barriers. The process has also become more accessible as learners no longer need a log in to access. Tutor time is now used more effectively and enables the important interview before joining a course to focus on each learner's individual needs and aspirations. Attendance on these sessions has increased from 55% previously to 96% due to these changes.

Whilst we appreciate not all our learners will want to, or have the skills to access an assessment online, we will use this model to support learners who may arrive in our centre or use our phone lines to request information about a course. Tutor support in centres will be available for those learners who require it to ensure our classes remain accessible for all.

However, we are aware that to continue to maximise our learners' successes we need to identify ways in which they understand what their own starting point means for their journey and see the progression they make throughout their programme of learning.

References

Ofsted, 2021, *Education Inspection Framework* [online]. Gov.uk: Ofsted. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-inspection-framework/education-inspection-framework#provision-inspected> [accessed 14 May 2021].

Morsanyi, K., Tomasetto, C., O'Connor, P., and Guardabassi, V., 2020. What a fear of maths does to children – new research. *The Conversation* [online blog], 3 December. Available at: [What a fear of maths does to children – new research \(theconversation.com\)](https://theconversation.com/what-a-fear-of-maths-does-to-children-new-research) [accessed 6 January 2021].

Appendix 1 – The project team

| Project Role | Name | Job Role |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Project Lead | Sonia Clark | Curriculum Lead – Maths |
| Project Deputy | Jo Loss | Learning Technologies Manager |
| Project Mentor | Rachel Öner (ccConsultancy) | |
| Research Group Lead | Claire Callow (ccConsultancy) | |

Appendix 2 - Initial tutor feedback on the process

Positives:

- I am able to email to learners who did not attend the lesson due to shift work/kids at home do complete the IA when they are available then email me when is convenient to ring them.
- Can assess more than eight at a time (eight is the max number of rooms on BBB).
- I was able to send to Level 1 learners in a lesson, then continue the lesson with Level 2 work without interruptions.

Negatives:

- No matter how many times I said and put in email with link, learners still used their calculator, used more time than was suggested or completed it more than once.
- I don't think the system should show the learner their score, once spoken to the tutor and gone over the workings then we tell them their score, as we may feel it necessary to take off marks for having help or guessed. Then they would not feel disappointed and feel it necessary to take again.

Appendix 3 - Initial Learner feedback

I found it easy enough to use 😊 I liked it (E.R)

The assessment online was really easy to download and straightforward to use. It was helpful that you called me back and we were able to go through the questions I got wrong (S.C)

Appendix 4 - Feedback on new changes

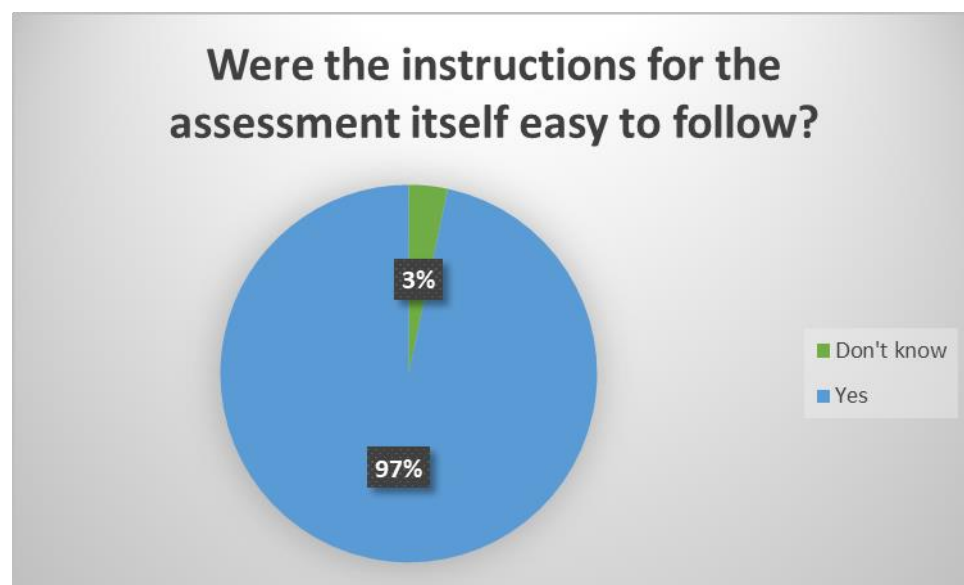
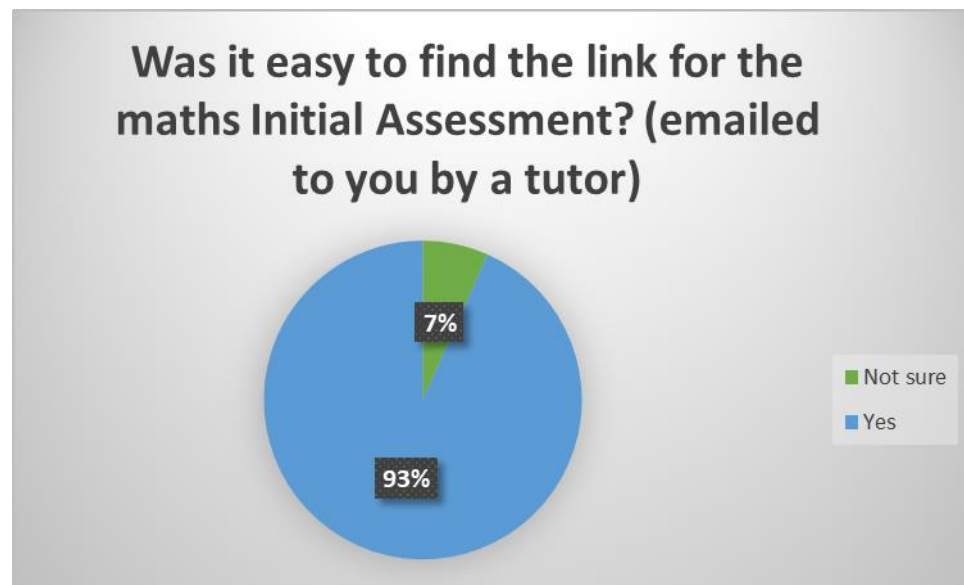
Tutor feedback:

- Definitely less stressful process
- With this new process, you don't have to spend most of your time having to fix technology issues as they do not need to login to anything.
- No one had any issues completing the IA form
- You can concentrate much more on the interviews as you're not trying to juggle four other learners at the same time all at different stages or having technical issues
- You get a proper chance to chat with the learners and they have time to ask the questions they need to so that they can choose the most appropriate course for them. I also think because it is a proper 1:1 they feel more comfortable discussing any concerns or declaring any additional needs
- Learners are more inclined to complete the IA if they know they won't get a pre-course interview otherwise.

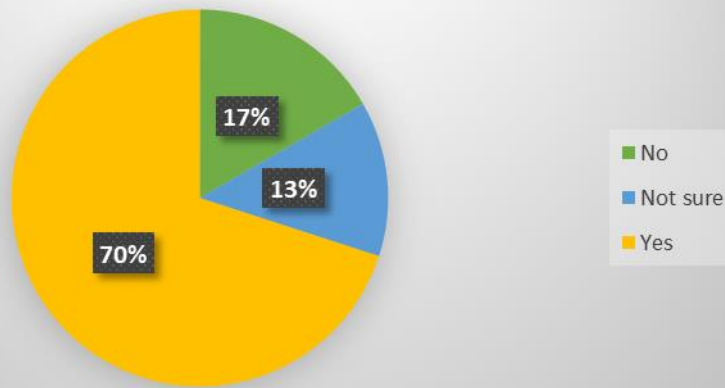
Learner feedback:

- The process was easy, efficient, and straightforward. I would never have thought it was something new. What I would have appreciated, is some feedback on my initial assessment and a bit more time to talk through my needs. But I appreciate that this might happen next week when I do the diagnostic
- I found it all really easy. The tutor was lovely and I'm happily working through my course now
- It was all pretty straight forward
- I found it a very easy and smooth process.
- I found it perfect
- I had to contact the technical team myself to get my account set up to access the interview. Apart from that the online process is a very good idea.
- It all seemed straightforward enough, bearing in mind it's all online, so no issues with access.

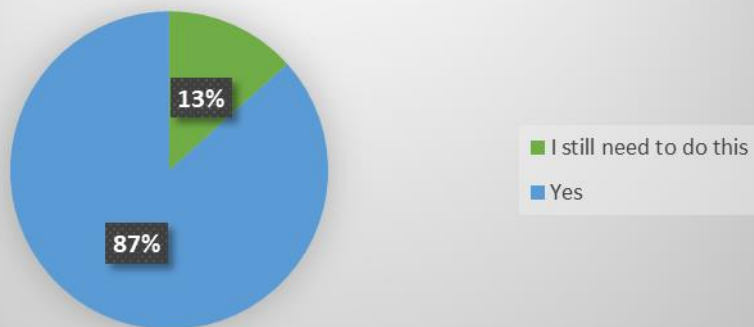
Appendix 5 - Feedback from learners on the new enrolment process



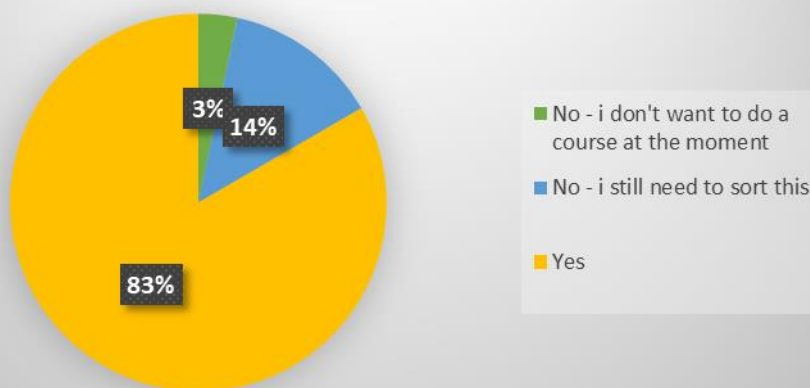
Do you now have an idea of your maths level / starting point?



Have you completed the pre-course interview / meeting via video call with a tutor?



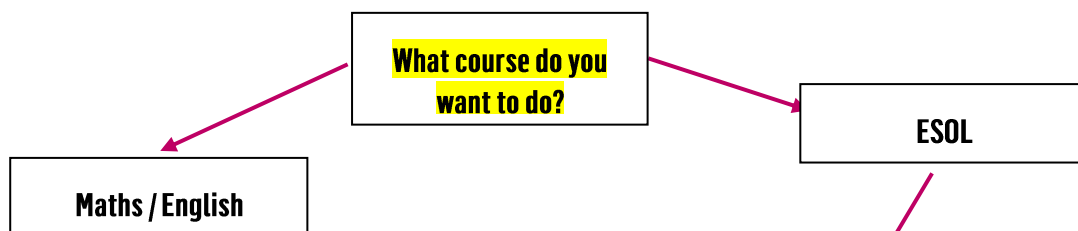
Are you enrolled on / attending a maths course now?



Appendix 6 - English / maths / ESOL process & script

Functional Skills and GCSE

Text highlighted yellow is a question to be asked or script.



Continue below

CS: Before you can do a course, you need to do an assessment and provide some further information. Our assessments are online. Do you use emails? Do you have a smart phone or a computer? You will be sent an email to complete an online form.

If they indicate this is a problem – offer the next available face to face assessment at their centre; give them the date and time and explain someone will be in touch if any changes.

CS: Great– I will book you on to an online assessment and explain what will happen.

Book on to the next available online ESOL assessment associated with their local centre.

CS: You are booked on an assessment now.

You will receive an email. Please read the email and follow the link.

The assessment will ask you for some personal information and you will need to attach some documents such as ID. You can ask someone to help you with that bit or use a translator.

You will also be asked to do some reading and writing which you should do by yourself. It should take between 30 and 60 minutes, depending on your level.

After you return it, a tutor will contact you within 10 working days to arrange to speak to you about the courses that are best for you.

End.

Do you want to attend a class in one of our centres, or via online live or self-study learning?

An Initial Assessment needs to be completed before you can enrol.
Would you like to do this in a centre or online?

If learner chooses online

In order to access an online assessment session, you will need a suitable device. This can be a smart phone, laptop, tablet, or computer. Do you have one of these?

YES

Book onto online pre-course interview / assessment session

NO

Book onto centre-based Pre-Course Interview / IA/ DA session.

Remind them they will need to bring photo ID & proof of address with them to the session.

You will shortly receive an email that includes the initial assessment link. You must complete the assessment as soon as possible. This is the first step of the assessment process. The second step is a pre-course interview with a tutor. This will take place through a video meeting.

For English: a tutor will contact you by email, in advance of the assessment session date booked, to arrange a suitable time to meet you online. The tutor will discuss your assessment activity and will complete the enrolment process with you. You will be asked to show the assessing tutor photo ID and proof of address. Please have this available for the session.

For Maths: a tutor will contact you by email to give an allocated timeslot for the pre-course interview date we have just booked. The tutor will go through your assessment with you, discuss available classes and will enrol you on a suitable class. You will be asked to show the assessing tutor photo ID and proof of address. Please have this available for the session.

Reminder note for frontline staff / call centre:

Online Live is attending a virtual class at the same day and time each week with the tutor teaching to camera.

Online Self-study is the learner working through a series of web-based modules in their own time.

Reminder note: If they have expressed an interest in an online live or online self-study learning course please make them aware that they will need to have access to the following:

- Wi-Fi
- laptop or computer (not a tablet)
- for online live courses – a camera and mic (this may be built into the laptop)
- for online self-study courses – access to a printer
- for online live courses – access to a scanner.

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