

Initial and diagnostic assessment for functional skills

HMP North Sea Camp



Context of work and development through the Support Programme

HMP North Sea Camp is currently an adult male open prison, categorised as 'D' (the lowest security rating). Prison education is managed by Lincoln College, and classes and work related learning activities take place in the education block and in classrooms within vocational workshops. Prisoners also work on a wide variety of jobs within the prison, including kitchen, farm and buildings maintenance. Roughly 25% of the 382 prisoners currently at HMP North Sea Camp work outside the prison in paid or voluntary work.

The changes in funding of qualifications for delivery of English, maths and ESOL will impact on the provision within the prison. The education team at HMP North Sea Camp have been delivering functional skills since 2010 and their experience highlighted some key issues connected to initial and diagnostic assessment. Functional skills qualifications assess learners' abilities to solve complex problems independently, using maths, English and ICT. Rachel Poll, HMP North Sea Camp's Education Manager, and her team felt that existing initial and diagnostic tools were inadequate for assessing learners' abilities to use maths, English and ICT 'functionally'. In addition, they were conscious of the amount of complex information prisoners are faced with when they enter a new prison and Rachel wanted to contextualise the assessments, wherever possible, to help induct new prisoners to prison life.

Review, revise and research

The team at HMP North Sea Camp are highly motivated and receptive to change. However, they are very small in number and wanted some external guidance to help them review their ideas and plan their development work. The support offered by Claire Collins, from Training Plus Merseyside, enabled them design a strategic plan for change, which included:

- identifying 'gaps' in existing assessment tools and approaches
- designing and critically reviewing the assessment materials
- developing learner-led Functional Skills tracking sheets
- embedding use of the new assessments and processes in prisoners' learner journeys

In order to critically review the assessments and processes being developed, the team wished to collaborate with colleagues working in prisons and in the wider further education

Supported provider

Lincoln College, HMP North Sea Camp:

- Rachel Poll, Education Manager

Improvement partner

Training Plus Merseyside:

- Claire Collins, English, ESOL and maths Specialist

sector. Claire was able to support Rachel to make contact with colleagues inside and outside Offender Learning as part of Training Plus Merseyside's role as an improvement partner. In addition, Rachel and her team decided to take part in an LSIS-funded action research project to further evaluate the effectiveness of the tools and approaches they were designing.

Differentiating assessment

When designing the functional skills assessment tools and approaches, the team came to understand that a 'one size fits all' approach would not work. At Entry Level, for example, they decided to bring together maths and English into one assessment. This was partly because learners doing functional maths courses also need to be able to read and respond to text confidently to pass their end assessments. It was also because prisoners have to undertake a variety of tasks that require the use of maths and English. An example of this is ordering food, toiletries and other essential items from a complex 'canteen sheet'. The team recognised the difficulty that many Entry Level learners face when using this sheet to order their provisions. They therefore used it as the source material for the Entry Level assessment in order to support the men to be more independent when managing their life in prison as well as assess functional maths and English abilities. The complexity of the canteen sheet is demonstrated in an example below.

At Levels 1 and 2, the assessments were split into separate maths and English tasks. The team based the reading assessment on two documents relating to life at HMP North Sea Camp; an historical text about how the prison was built and a modern article about the prison's organic farm. The writing task requires learners to plan and write an 'e-mail' to the Education Manager explaining their previous experiences of education and what they hope to gain from it in the future. Rachel's team use marking sheets (incorporating elements such as logical sequencing, clarity and accuracy) to assess this writing. In addition, Rachel will be able to take account of key points raised in these 'e-mails', as a 'learner voice' element in her quality reviews and curriculum planning.

Maths at Levels 1 and 2 required a different approach to English. At first, the team designed a series of problem solving tasks. However, having piloted these with learners, they felt that the 'underpinning' maths elements were difficult to identify and set targets for. To address this issue, they added some more traditional 'sums' to the assessment and now have a model that combines the assessment of, for example, an ability to multiply two digit numbers, along with an ability to solve a problem - such as the amount and cost of fencing required to fence a garden of given dimensions.

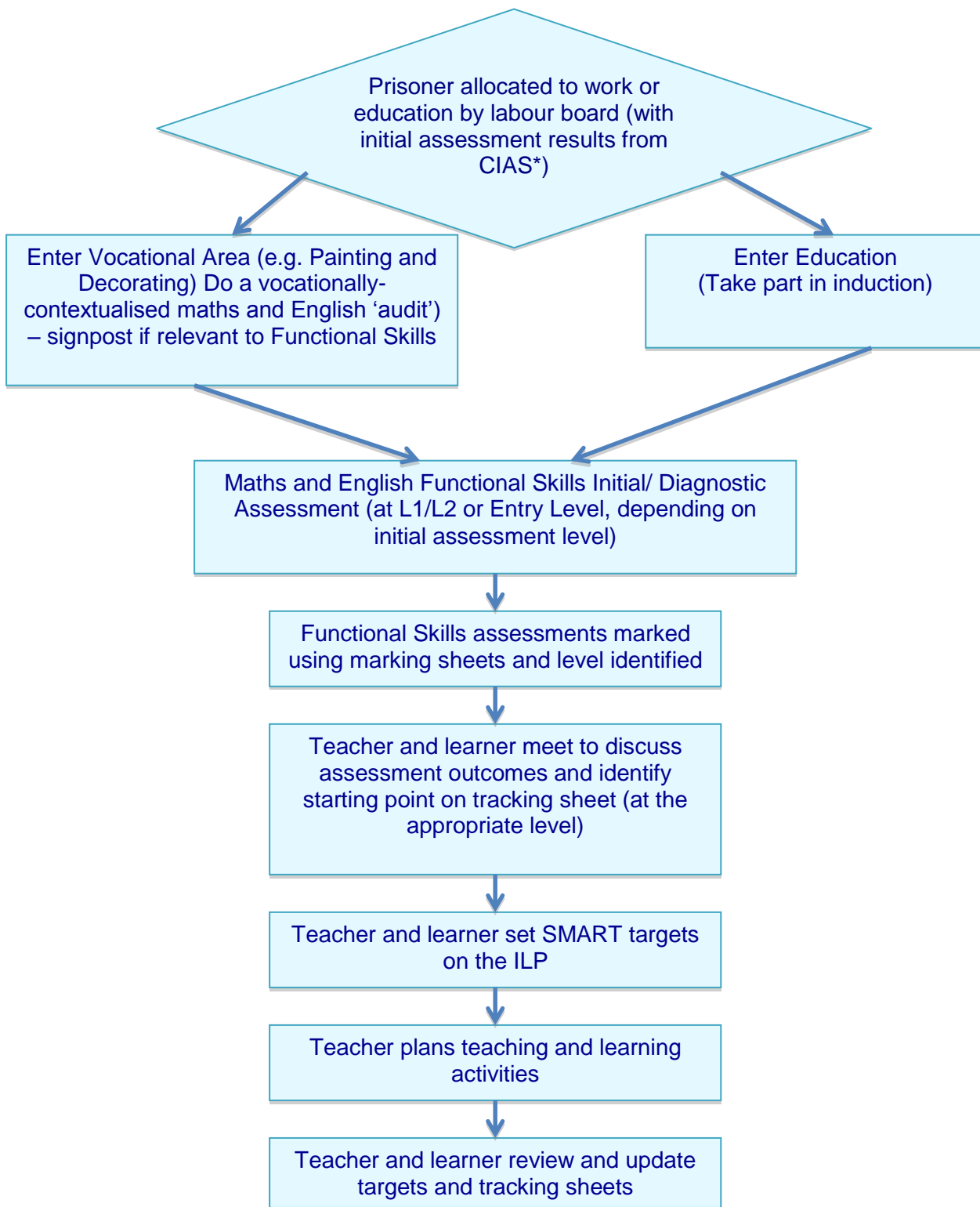
Supporting learners to recognise their progress

To enable teachers to use assessment outcomes as the basis for setting and monitoring SMART functional skills targets with learners, the team designed maths and English 'tracking sheets' from Entry 1 to Level 2. Learners have to identify on the tracking sheets where they feel they sit on a scale from 1–10 in terms of various functional maths and English abilities. These decisions are informed by the results of the functional skills assessment tasks because each of the criteria is linked to an assessment question/ questions (and these links are noted on the tracking sheet).

Maths Entry Level 3 topics										
For each of the maths topics below, how confident do you feel?										
Mark from 1 – 10 (1 = not at all confident, 10 = very confident)										
Recognise	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Understand problems from visuals (e.g. diagrams) and recognise the maths needed to solve them										
Understand problems in words and recognise the maths needed to solve them (Question 4 – 14)										
Understand problems in numbers and recognise the maths needed to solve them										
Apply	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Use whole numbers up to 1000										
Calculate with 2 digit numbers (Question 6-14)										
Add and subtract using 3 digit numbers (Questions 6,7,8,12,13 & 14)										
Multiply and divide using whole numbers (Questions 8,9,10 & 13)										
Know 2, 3, 4, 5 and 10 timestables (Question 10)										
Round to the nearest 10 or 100 (Question 11)										
Use simple fractions (Question 9-10)										
Calculate using decimals up to 2 decimal places e.g. money and measurements (Questions 6,7,8,11,12,13)										
Estimate, measure and compare length, capacity, weight and temperature										
Name and draw simple 2D and 3D shapes										

Next steps

The team are still in the process of carrying out their action research. To ensure that staff at HMP North Sea Camp and external reviewers can understand and critically examine the assessment process, Rachel designed a flow chart showing the new stages in the functional skills learner journey. Along with the assessment tools and tracking sheets, the flowchart will be modified in line with research findings.



All round impact

The development work has enabled the team to design functional skills assessment tools and approaches that they believe are fit for purpose. They have also been able to design activities that help prisoners undertake wider prison tasks.

As with all development work undertaken by supported providers, Training Plus Merseyside benefits by learning from the experiences of others and embedding this into working practices back at base. To this end, a working group, consisting of Training Plus Merseyside Functional Skills team members and a team from another local supported provider have reviewed the assessment tools developed by HMP North Sea Camp and will now work on a similar model for learners doing covering functional skills as part of their apprenticeship frameworks. Similarly, other supported providers who have been reviewing the tools will also work on their own models, using texts and source materials that are relevant to their local areas or contexts. This cascade effect that results from working in partnership is one of the key benefits of the LSIS Support Programme.