

Starting with a “clean slate”: embedding functional skills in prison work and training

HMP Oakwood



Who we are

HMP Oakwood is Britain’s newest prison. It is located next to the existing HMP Featherstone and HMP Brinsford near Wolverhampton and is named after an oak tree - the so-called ‘Royal Oak’ - thought to have been used by King Charles II to hide from Cromwell’s troops, in nearby Boscobel Wood. The prison is operated by G4S and, currently, the education contract is being managed by Milton Keynes College.

HMP Oakwood is one of the largest prisons in England and Wales, providing places for up to 1,605 Category C male prisoners. HMP Oakwood’s staff have had the rare and exciting opportunity to start with a completely ‘clean slate’.

New beginnings, new opportunities

The newly appointed Education Management Team responsible for general education, vocational training and personal/social development (PSD) were keen to take an innovative approach to the development and delivery of education within the prison. They identified early on that they wanted to deliver maths and English through an embedded approach, linked closely to the prison’s vocational training and work. This represented a challenge because functional skills delivery is in its infancy in the prison sector. However, the team appreciated the important role that embedding functional skills can have on the success of the whole curriculum (recognised in the September 2012 Ofsted inspection framework). They regarded embedding functional skills as key to securing good learning outcomes, higher learner satisfaction, meeting English and maths targets and raising standards in teaching and learning.

The development process

The management team’s first step to implementing their new, whole organisation approach was to interview teachers, vocational trainers and PSD specialists with a view to them working holistically across different subjects and across the prison. Next, the team used

Supported provider

HMP Oakwood:

- Sunil Singh, Senior Curriculum Team Leader, Functional Skills and ICT

Improvement partner

CfBT Education Trust:

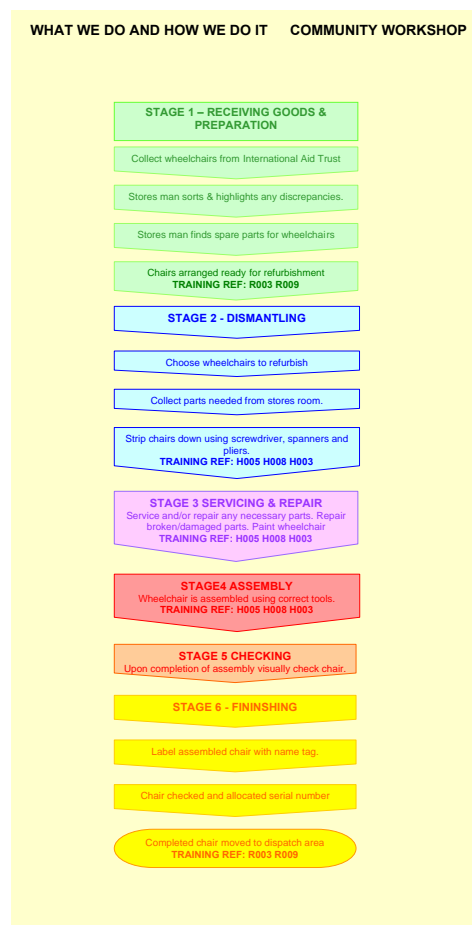
- Claire Collins, Development Adviser

their LSIS Account to pay for a six-day package of English, maths and ESOL support. Their development adviser facilitated the development of an action plan. However, prior to developing their own embedded learning approaches, the management team decided to do some research into other providers' experiences.

Building on existing models

In order to ensure they were building on good practice the team:

- read and discussed a case study about embedding functional skills in vocational training from HMP North Sea Camp
<http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/16852>
- visited Walsall College, with Beacon Status and excellent success rates in embedded Functional Skills in vocational areas.
- reviewed work flow charts from HMP Garth designed by vocational specialists to aid teachers' understanding of workshop processes (see opposite)
- discussed embedded learning research findings, e.g. from the *National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy* (NRDC)
http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications_details.asp?ID=21



HMP Garth Workflow Diagram, 2009

As a result of this research, the team decided that it was vital to develop a collaborative working model with maths/ English and vocational specialists working alongside one another. This was a key success factor for embedded learning identified throughout their investigations and was confirmed by NRDC findings in the report; “*You wouldn’t expect a maths teacher to teach plastering*” (NRDC, 2006)

“Qualities possessed by tutors and relationships between them were more important than general curricular models of embedded provision.”

NRDC, 2005

To facilitate working in this way, the management team identified the priorities for success in embedding functional skills within the prison.

Team work:

commitment to collaborative teamwork from all staff

formal and informal shared planning

team identity eg shared staff rooms, joint activities

Team values:

shared commitment to learners' vocational success

respect for, and understanding of, each person's specialism

commitment to learn from each other.

Features of effective embedded provision, NRDC 2006

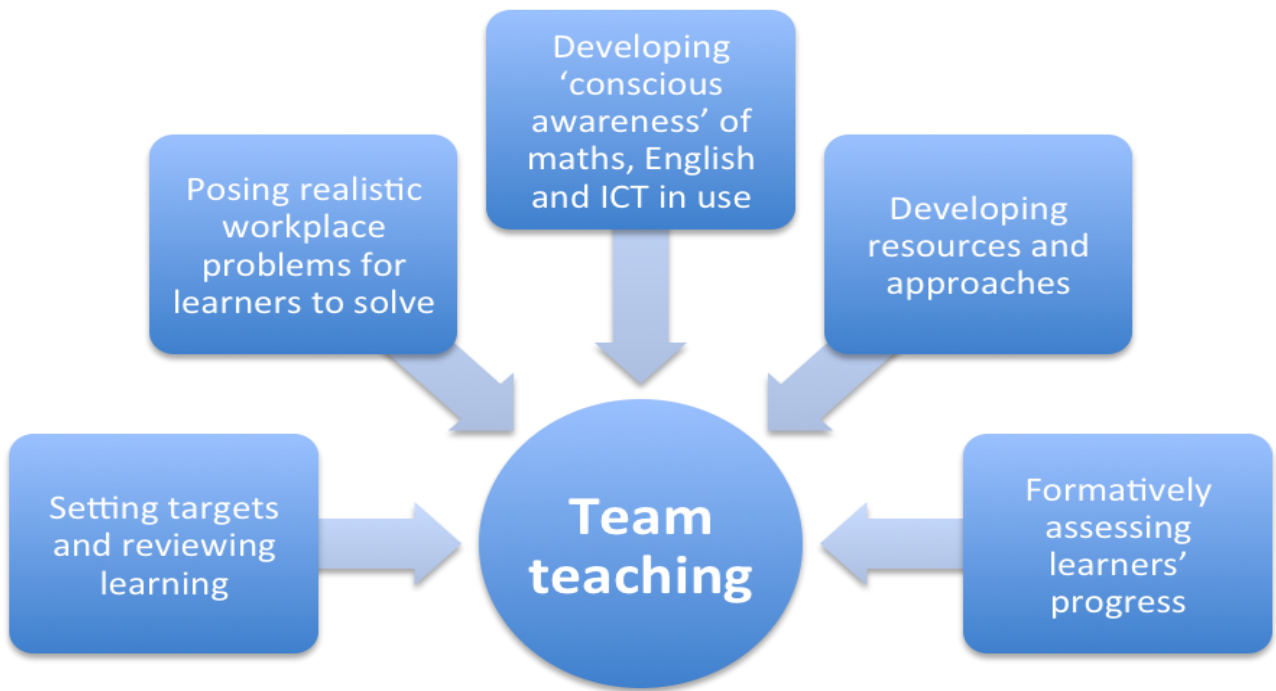
Leading by example

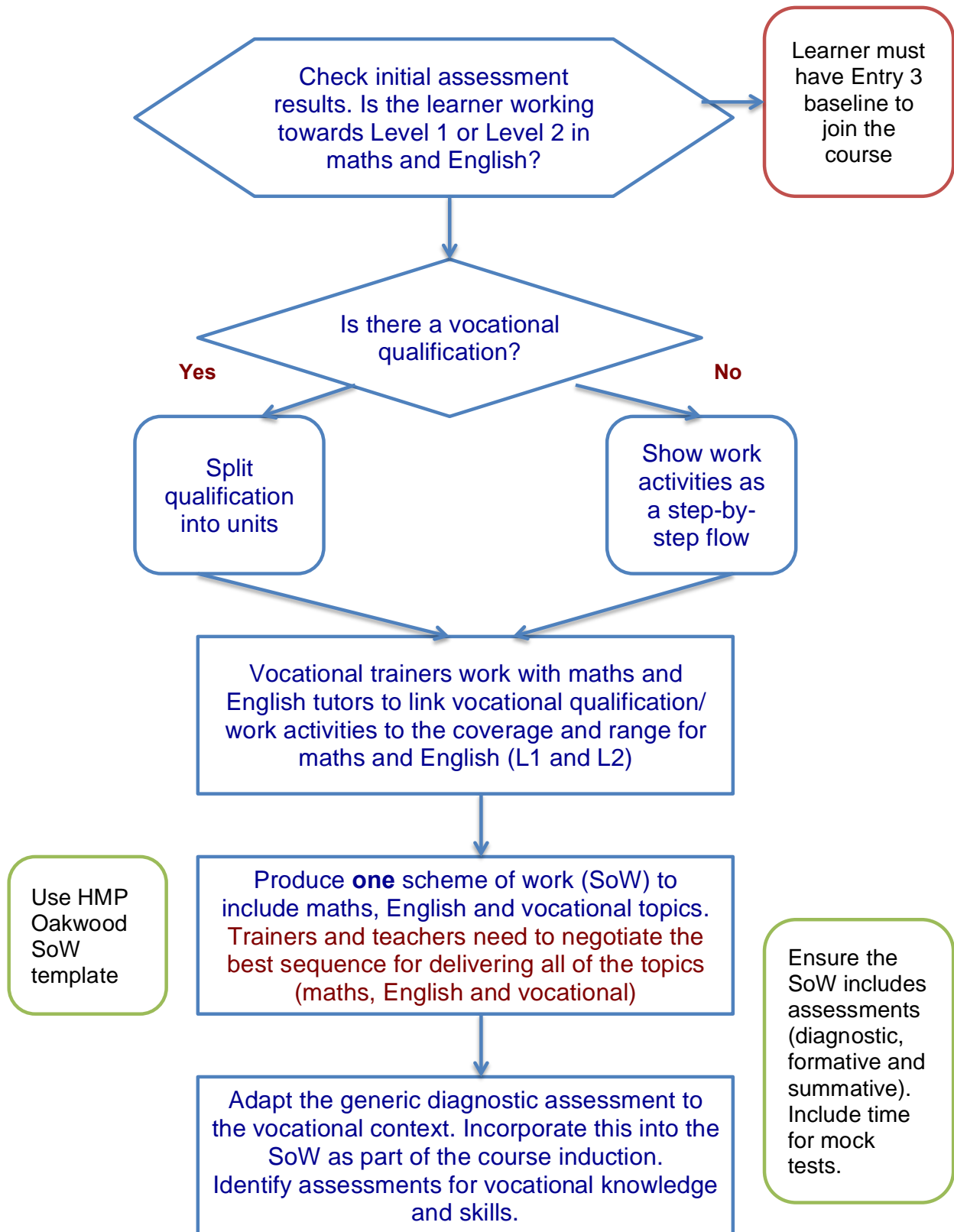
The management team decided that the development process should be done as a series of action research cycles, identifying catering as their pilot activity. The catering and functional skills team leaders worked together to plan their 'embedded learning development process'. To facilitate this, their development adviser shared a flow chart designed by an embedding learning project team at HMP North Sea Camp in 2010/11. This was cut into sections and arranged in the order they thought it should be done in HMP Oakwood. The discussions that followed each step, and possible alternatives, resulted in the creation of an HMP Oakwood flowchart (see opposite). This will be used in the same way; at various stages through the pilot course delivery, team leaders will return to the flowchart and identify if the stages are working as planned, or if they need to be adapted. These reviewed steps will then be shared, to facilitate discussion and transfer of the process across the various learning, skills and work teams in the prison.



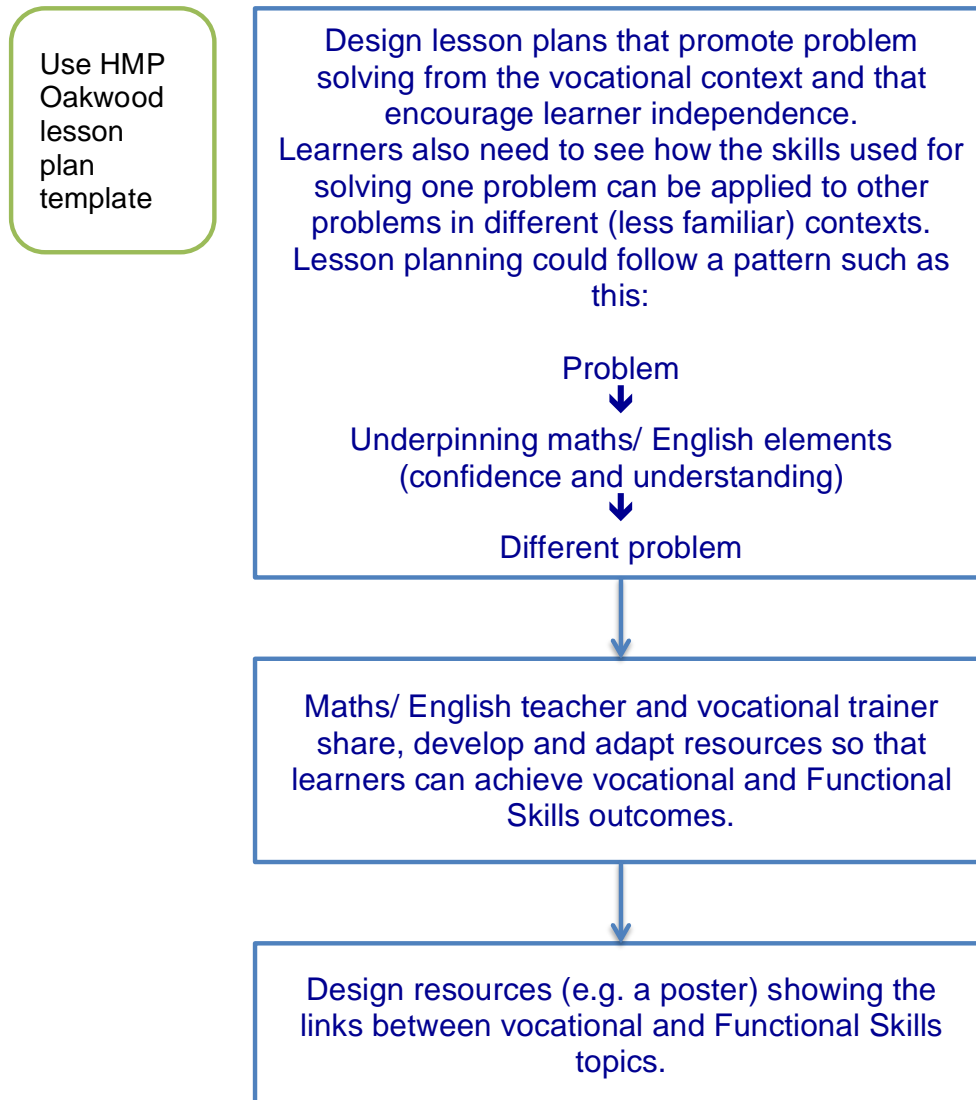
Embedded Learning Process Flowchart HMP Oakwood

The flowchart which was initially produced for embedding functional skills into all vocational areas is at the end of this document. The plan for developing delivery in the catering pilot is through team teaching, and the key points have been highlighted in the diagram below.





Embedding Functional Skills into Vocational Areas, HMP
Oakwood, March 2012



How is it going?

HMP Oakwood now has 20 programmes which embed functional skills covering all the main strands of our provision – ICT and Business; vocational training, personal development and employability. All new courses introduced will follow suit, resulting in a fully embedded curriculum at Oakwood. It has proved successful with both learners and staff:

Building

“Learning about ratio and proportion has helped me understand how to mix the right plaster and work out the area for a room and have less waste”.

- Learner

“Embedding Functional Skills into vocational areas is a major catalyst for innovation and creativity in lessons which will ultimately improve general skills and wider competencies in any chosen vocational area”.

- Teacher

Momentum has been maintained, with regular staff development identified as an absolute must along with full support from senior management. Commitment to a wholly embedded approach to functional skills is vital to long term success, as are sustainable and collaborative partnerships between vocational and functional skills teachers. Constant synergy between partners is essential with the possibility of embedding never ruled out, even if it appears to be a challenge at first.