



Functional skills case study: MidKent College

The context

MidKent College is one of Kent's largest education and training providers. Every year the college delivers thousands of qualifications to 4,500 16-18-year-old students and 2,300 adult students. Subjects range from welding to healthcare and literature to life sciences. The college is committed to developing the literacy, numeracy and ICT skills of its student population in order to prepare them for life and work. The college has adopted a whole-organisation approach to skills for life, led and supported by the senior leadership team.

The pilot

The college has been piloting functional skills since 2007: in 2008/9 a head of faculty for skills for life (SfL) was appointed, with the remit of introducing a fully embedded approach to the implementation of functional skills. In 2008/9 the college entered 415 students for a functional skills qualification and in 2009/10 took the bold decision to move to replacing key skills qualifications with functional skills where possible.

Staffing

As part of the move to a fully embedded model, in 2008/9 subject-specialist SfL staff were located in curriculum areas but were line-managed by the head of faculty for skills for life. The next step, although not popular, was to fully integrate SfL staff into faculties, where they are perceived by students to be an integral part of their vocational learning. This has raised the profile of functional skills as part of the student's holistic development.

Pilot progress

- All students are initially assessed at application, interview or enrolment and diagnostically assessed in induction week.
- All students studying on a full-time programme at level 2 and below have to take two functional skills, unless they are working towards a Diploma, in which case they are required to achieve all three functional skills at an appropriate level.
- Adults and young people studying at level 3 do not automatically take functional skills qualifications.
- SfL strategic and operation groups have been established and meet regularly.
- A functional skills success plan is in place with an action plan that is shared by all stakeholders.
- In January, 1,918 students took a functional skills examination.
- Functional skills exam attendance for January was a staggering 91% and 84% for March.
- Overall college achievement in functional skills was 60% in January.
- We have 1,700 students taking entry-level functional skills.

Lessons learned

- The success of functional skills requires buy-in from all stakeholders and all stakeholders need to be involved in decisions.
- Students need to be prepared for the exam and complete a minimum of one mock paper.
- Staff need to feel supported and offered training, often bespoke, within faculties.
- Staff need clear guidance on a structure for embedding functional skills into schemes of work.
- Statistics have proved useful in planning for the future.

For further details about functional skills support in the South East, please contact South East regional facilitator Annette Welfare via the [South East regional centre](#).