

“we’re here
to help you
improve
your
workforce”

**skills for life - a practical guide for social care
employers**

april 2009





contents

introduction	02
what is skills for life?	03
What do we mean by skills for life?	03
Understanding skills for life 'levels'	04
Why do some of us have difficulty with skills for life and what impact does this have?	06
Why is skills for life so important in social care?	07
why should we take action?	11
Everybody benefits	11
10 reasons why employers don't take action on skills for life	13
Hear from those who have already done it	18
What can employers do about skills for life?	20
Manage skills for life in four steps	20
What funding and other help is available?	21
Where to start?	25
Getting your communication right	27
Support for people with dyslexia	31
Support for migrant workers and overseas staff	32
ICT is a skill for life too	34

This guide is for the convenience of social care providers. Whilst Skills for Care uses its best endeavors to make sure information is accurate and up to date, we cannot take any responsibility for the content contained herein.



introduction

Every job role in adult social care involves using and understanding information, and communicating effectively. This means that everyone working in the sector needs to have good language and number skills to do their job well and to guarantee high quality care services.

Research suggests many adult social care staff may lack the ability and confidence to apply skills for life effectively in one or more areas of their job. Although we might expect to find some literacy or numeracy needs amongst lower qualified staff, we must also recognise that significant skills for life needs are often found amongst those with higher-level qualifications. This might be because an individual has changed job role, is taking on new tasks that require different skills, or it might be that well-qualified and competent staff from overseas have started a new job without a full command of English or a full understanding of UK culture.

The sector wants to attract people with the potential to become motivated, competent social care workers. The sector also wants to retain experienced care workers, enabling them to develop higher skills and work flexibly in a range of different roles. It is critical that skills for life issues are recognised and managed for either of these aims to be realised.

Skills for Care wants to promote skills for life development across all parts of the adult social care sector in England.

The expected benefits of improved communication, number and information and communication technology (ICT) skills are:

- improved quality of care.
- increased staff retention giving lower recruitment costs.
- higher qualification achievement rates and general skills development.
- improved health, safety and risk management.

Skills for Care has developed a strategy that outlines the skills for life needs of the adult social care sector, and the actions that Skills for Care will take to address them. This strategy is free to download from our web site www.skillsforcare.org.uk in the developing skills section.

We have also produced this practical guide, which we hope will help busy social care employers get to grips with skills for life quickly and easily. This guide is also free to download from our website or email marketing@skillsforcare.org.uk for your free copy.



what is skills for life?

what do we mean by skills for life?

Skills for life includes literacy, language, numeracy and basic ICT (information and communications technology).

Literacy refers to speaking, listening, responding, reading with understanding and writing to communicate. Although skills in languages other than English can be very useful in the workplace, it is important that everyone working in social care has good communication skills in English and develops a good understanding of the local culture.

Numeracy refers to understanding, using, calculating and manipulating mathematical information. It also involves interpreting results, analysing data and communicating mathematical information.

Basic ICT involves using everyday ICT equipment and applications such as mobile phones, simple word processing, email and any equipment used to support care work. (This is often referred to as assistive technology).

ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) is used to describe the type of literacy teaching that is designed specifically for people whose first language is not English.

There are three main groups of people that might have ESOL needs:

- 1) People from settled communities (originating from places such as India, Pakistan or Hong Kong) who have not developed good English skills.
- 2) Refugees and asylum-seekers who may be well educated and have held professional jobs in another country.
- 3) Migrant workers mainly originating from countries in the European Union (such as Portugal and Poland) but also from non-EU countries (such as Bulgaria or Malaysia).

Given their wide range of backgrounds and circumstances, it is likely that these groups will also have a wide range of very different learning and support needs. ESOL learners might:

- have poor reading and writing skills in their own language
- have had no formal education
- be highly educated
- speak several languages



30-50% of those working in social care in England were born outside the UK – many will therefore have support needs relating to English.





understanding skills for life ‘levels’

There are national standards for most subjects and national tests or qualifications that relate directly to these standards. Each qualification is categorised according to the level of skill that someone needs in order to achieve it. This means that we can compare different types of qualification with one another in terms of the level of difficulty involved.

The table on the next page shows how the skills for life levels relate to other qualifications and gives an idea of the particular literacy or numeracy skills involved. For example:

Adults with literacy and numeracy skills at entry level 3 will probably be able to:

- Write a short note or email for a colleague.
- Fill in an accident form correctly.
- Use the index in a catalogue or phone book.
- Talk to customers and colleagues using polite and appropriate language.
- Complete time-sheets or do a stock-check.
- Check the deductions on a wage slip.

Adults who develop their literacy and numeracy skills to level 2 would be able to:

- Read and understand health and safety notices and instructions.
- Read and understand reports and compare the benefits of different options.
- Punctuate sentences correctly in written work, including commas and apostrophes.
- Draw correct conclusions from graphical information.
- Make effective contributions in meetings, appraisals and training sessions.
- Calculate the percentage increase or decrease on the cost of supplies.

Level 2 is generally regarded as the ‘benchmark’ expected of everyone in work, with 90 percent of all jobs likely to demand level 2 skills by 2010.



skills for life level	what this means	equivalent levels of qualification or learning
		postgraduate NVQ5
		graduate NVQ4
		A-Levels NVQ3
level 2	Skills are secure and transferable. Can access training and qualifications. Could compare products and services for best buy, work out a household budget, research information on web sites, and join in with interactive and complex discussions.	GCSE A*-C NVQ 2
level 1	Can access straightforward, everyday material. Could read a bus or train timetable, take part in a group discussion, and check pay and deductions on a wage slip.	GCSE D-G NVQ 1
entry 3	Can read familiar, basic everyday material. Could understand price labels on pre-packed foods, complete a form with basic personal information, and pay household bills.	Entry 3 National school curriculum age 9-11
entry 2	Can only read very basic material. Could use a cashpoint machine, understand a straightforward information leaflet, or describe a child's symptoms to a doctor.	Entry 2 National school curriculum age 7-9
entry 1	May recognise numbers, letters and symbols and know a few key words. Could write a short, informal note, interpret straightforward health and safety signs, or select floor numbers in a lift.	Entry 1 National school curriculum age 5-7



why do some of us have difficulty with skills for life and what impact does this have?

We all tend to lose skills that we don't use regularly. This is why many of us would now struggle with some of the maths we could do in school. It is also why most people are better at reading than writing – we simply get much more practice.

Adults who have particular difficulty with skills for life have often been unable to develop their communication and number skills. This could be for many reasons, including:

- Absence from school due to illness.
- Unsettled home life or family problems.
- Poor teaching.
- Inadequate support for a visual/hearing impairment or dyslexia.
- English as an additional language.

Poorly developed skills for life can have a significant and negative impact on people's lives outside work, affecting their health, housing, finances and relationships. Over time, it is likely that the problems employees face in these areas will also have further negative impact back in the workplace.



why is skills for life so important in social care?

literacy

The impact of poorly developed literacy skills at work could mean that employees:

- Struggle to read and understand written information, including health and safety instructions, policy guidance, care plans and reports.
- Are unable to write clearly and accurately when writing in a day book, leaving messages, or when completing routine forms such as timesheets.
- Cannot produce case records or risk assessment logs to a professional standard even though such documents might be relied on as evidence at inspection or during a complaint process.
- Have difficulty following verbal instructions or communicating appropriately with colleagues, external organisations, people who use services and their relatives or friends.
- Find it very difficult to achieve vocational qualifications or to benefit from work-based training opportunities.
- Are unable to cope with change and development or new working practices taking place in the workplace.

90% of jobs will require level 2 skills by 2010 and figures from 2003 showed that 26 million people aged 16-65 do not meet level 2 standards in literacy and numeracy.

numeracy

The impact of poorly developed numeracy skills at work could mean that employees:

- Are unable to estimate quantities, costs and timings.
- Cannot make quick mental calculations and lack the confidence to do routine calculations, even with the use of a calculator.
- Don't always take accurate measurements or readings and are unable to spot errors.
- Make mistakes when recording numerical data and have difficulty interpreting information displayed in the form of graphs or charts.
- Don't understand wage slips, tax deductions or options relating to pensions.
- Have difficulty reading the time or understanding timetables leading to poor time management.
- Find it very difficult to achieve vocational qualifications or to benefit from work-based training opportunities.
- Are unable to cope with change and development or new working practices taking place in the workplace.



In the UK far more adults struggle with numeracy than with literacy. This is thought to be caused by a combination of factors including poor teaching in school and gradual fading of skills through lack of use. However, there is also a significant cultural factor in that we don't value maths skills as much as, for example, creative skills, and so it becomes easier for individuals to admit to or tolerate skills gaps.

“ **People with poor numeracy are more than twice as likely to be unemployed as those with competent numeracy.** ”

“ **6.8 million adults in the UK workforce have difficulties in adding or subtracting three digit numbers.** ”

english for speakers of other languages (ESOL)

The impact of poorly developed English language skills at work could mean that employees:

- Don't have the vocabulary they need to understand what is being said or to ask the questions that will help them understand. They may also feel reluctant to ask for help.
- Are unable to fully understand health and safety instructions or procedures and may not therefore be able to recognise or respond to emergencies.
- Have particular difficulty understanding or being understood by people with complex communication needs.
- Cannot contribute to workplace discussions and avoid getting involved in team activity due to lack of confidence in speaking English.
- Have difficulty building relationships with colleagues and settling into the workplace because of cultural barriers, as well as language difficulties.
- Are more likely to take time off work through illness and stress.
- Are reluctant to take up work-based training or vocational qualifications due to a fear of being unable to keep up.



basic ICT skills (information and communications technology)

The impact of poorly developed computer skills at work could mean that employees:

- Are unable to communicate in the ways that colleagues and external organisations expect.
- Cannot make best use of the information and resources available via the internet.
- Don't use technology to become more effective and more efficient.
- Are excluded from training and development opportunities that contain any element of e-learning.

Poorly developed ICT skills can also create difficulty and disadvantage in employees' lives outside work, as technology is no longer just a specialist tool for the workplace, but rather an essential tool for modern life.

77% of the UK workforce use ICT at work but 37% do not have appropriate IT skills.

The communication and number skills needed by social care workers are often at level 2 and include:

- Reading – understanding straightforward written and graphical information. For example, case notes, day book, letters, laundry labels, and safety signs.
- Writing – completing simple forms and records, writing notes and messages. For example, case notes, day book, records of medication and letters and forms for clients.
- Speaking and listening – talking face-to-face and on the telephone to a small number of people. For example, clients and their families, colleagues and other professionals.
- Numbers – writing numbers clearly and accurately. For example, telephone numbers, weights and sizes.
- Extracting information from graphs. For example, temperature, pulse or blood pressure
- Measuring. For example, dispensing medication under supervision, or weighing and measuring clients.



In specialist and supervisory roles, the additional skills needed might go higher than level 2 and include:

- Reading – understanding complex written and graphical information. For example, government policy papers, tender documents or regulatory guidance.
- Writing – completing return forms, writing reports and other documents. For example, supervision and appraisal notes, funding bids and guidance manuals.
- Speaking and listening – talking face-to-face and on the telephone to a range of individuals and groups. For example, negotiating on sensitive or complex issues, or participating in meetings, presentations and training.
- Numbers – maintaining accurate records and manipulating and analysing data. For example, budget management and statistical returns.
- Extracting and understanding information found in graphs, databases and statistical reports. For example, technical equipment, finance spreadsheets and budget reports.
- Measuring. For example, monitoring the use of medication, or managing stocks and supplies.



why should we take action on skills for life?

everybody benefits

Skills for life are the basic building blocks, or foundations, that all other skills are built on. We know that people who have difficulty with any of these skills can be incredibly resourceful, finding ways to cope with and maybe also disguise their skills gaps. However, without these basic building blocks, they will find it extremely difficult, if not impossible to develop other higher-level skills and respond to the ever-changing demands of the world around them.

Skills for life also includes basic level information and communications technology (ICT) skills. Although once considered essential only for those in hi-tech jobs, these skills are rapidly becoming an essential for everyday life.



Computing is not about computers any more. It is about living.
(Nicholas Negroponte)



The evidence from organisations that have already begun to invest in skills for life development in the workplace is that everybody benefits. It is a win-win situation for employers, employees and customers.

Benefits for the learner:

- Increased confidence at work and at home.
- Able to do their job better.
- Able to join in more and get more involved at work.
- Learn new skills.
- Encouraged to take on more training and qualifications.
- Increased motivation and job satisfaction.



1.4 million workers believe they have missed out on a promotion, or even lost a job, due to a lack of basic maths and English skills.



Benefits for the employer:

- Excellent return on investment, with long-term reduction in costs for recruitment, sickness and training.
- Improved learning rates and qualification levels.
- Better compliance with health and safety and regulatory requirements.
- Increased staff loyalty, commitment and flexibility.
- Improved quality of work.
- Reduced sickness absence and turnover rates.



Benefits for the people who use services:

- Improved communication with staff involved in direct care.
- Improved safety and reduced risk.
- Fewer mistakes and problems with services provided.
- Better quality and improved customer satisfaction.
- Improved continuity of care due to reduced staff turnover and sickness absence.
- Wider range of staff skills leading to a wider range of support available.

Research suggests that developing employees' skills may have a wide range of benefits, including increased employee retention, saving on average between £1,300 and £3,500 per employee.

To ensure safety and meet quality standards it is important employers do all they can to address skills for life.

Almost a third of the working population – 14.6 million people – admit to losing their company money due to a lack of basic maths and English skills.

A care assistant knew how to mix a batch of vitamin supplement drinks that would be enough for 10 people, but when asked to make the right amount for 13 people she struggled to do the maths. As she was embarrassed to ask for help, she decided to double the proportions needed for 10 people and then pour the leftovers down the sink.

How much money might be wasted in your workplace because staff struggle with number skills?

Do the people who order equipment and supplies know how to compare different ways of buying stock and calculate the best deals?

Do staff responsible for handling medicines know how to check that they haven't miscalculated the dose?



10 reasons why employers don't take action on skills for life (and 10 reasons why they should!)

1) "All my staff have qualifications so they don't need help with basic skills."

Just because staff are qualified doesn't mean they have all the literacy and numeracy skills they need to do their jobs really well.

Most people have 'spiky skills profiles'. This means they are good at the things they practice all the time, but less good at the things they don't do very often.

Problems arise when staff take on new responsibilities or when their roles change. This often means having to use a completely different set of skills, ones that might never have been used before, or that might need 'brushing-up'.

Even where staff do have sufficient skills for life to get by, evidence shows that developing these skills further can improve their work performance significantly.



30% of graduates don't have level 2 literacy skills.

48% don't have level 2 numeracy skills.

15% of senior managers and professionals have numeracy skills below level 1.



2) "I can't afford the cost of the training."

Good communication and number skills are critical throughout social care. They increase staff retention, raise qualification levels and improve the quality of care.

The current levels of funding for adult skills for life are very high. So are the short-term targets. (£620 million being spent in 2008/9 and 2.25 million adults to have improved literacy and numeracy skills by 2010).

In the future, employers and learners will probably have to pay for skills for life development and so the social care sector really should seize this opportunity while it's available.

There has never been a better or more important time to help your employees improve their skills for life.



Most skills for life training is free. However, you may have to contribute for some types of course including those for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) learners.

You should also budget for costs such as travel and replacement staff cover. Train to Gain can fund staff cover if you have fewer than 50 full-time employees (or the equivalent in part-time staff).

Get advice before you start, but remember that the return on your investment is likely to be very high.

Also remember that while current government funding for skills for life learning is very generous, free literacy and numeracy training is unlikely to be here forever. You really should make use of it while it is. Please see the funding section on page 21 of this guide for more information.



Skills for life issues are estimated to cost an average £86, 000 a year to businesses employing 51-100 people.



3) “It’s hard to release staff for training and we have to put mandatory courses such as NVQs and Health and Safety first.”

This can be a real problem if staff are expected to attend separate courses for skills for life and vocational training.

However, evidence shows that training is much more successful if it is delivered in an embedded way. That is, if the literacy, language or numeracy is taught as an integral part of a vocational course. Evidence also shows that learning in the workplace rather than in a college or other off-site learning centre can be very successful, particularly for those who have been away from learning for a while.

So, it is up to you to negotiate the type of learning that suits your organisation best.

For more information see page 23 - ‘making sure you get the right type of training’



4) “Shouldn’t this be sorted out by the schools? It’s not my responsibility.”

It is worth noting that 70% of the workforce that the UK will have in 2020 has already left school. So, whatever progress is made within the school system, we still have a huge problem with the skills gaps of those who have already left school.

Although it may seem unfair for employers to have to take on the responsibility for resolving these skills gaps, it is the only way we can get the recruits we need for the ever-growing social care sector.

In 2006-07: 45% of pupils leaving school had not gained level 2 maths (GCSE grades A* - C) and 40% had not gained level 2 English. More than 63,000 pupils left school without level 1 or 2 maths (a GCSE grade A* - G) . Almost 38,000 left without level 1 or 2 English.

5) “If I get them trained they are more likely to move to another job.”

This may seem like a very real risk, but more often than not, training actually encourages people to stay.

Skills for life training helps people do their jobs better and has a very positive effect on their confidence and on their life outside work. In turn, this builds loyalty and commitment, increases motivation and reduces staff turnover.

Companies that don’t train staff are twice as likely to go out of business as those that do.

6) “The situation is different with migrant workers. As soon as their English is good enough, they will move to other work that pays better. It would be a real waste to spend money on developing the language skills of staff who won’t be here for long.”

Offering English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) support to migrant workers is critical. It helps them settle into their new work and home environment, has a very positive effect on their confidence and improves their work performance.

There is always a risk that migrant workers will view their job as temporary and move elsewhere once they have better English. However, no care service can take the risk of employing staff who do not have the skills they need to operate safely and effectively at work.



As with other skills for life training, employees who are given the chance to develop their English language skills through work will probably show increased loyalty, commitment and motivation in the workplace and actually be less likely to leave for other employment.

7) “How can I help other people with their maths when I can’t even understand my kids’ homework?”

Why not get some skills for life development for yourself first? There’s nothing like a personal testimony to sell the idea to others and you will really be able to give them an accurate picture of what’s involved. You could have a go at the self-assessment tests at www.move-on.org.uk to give you an idea of where to start.

Or, get support from outside to introduce a ‘whole organisation approach’ to skills for life. This would mean that you could have your own skills assessed and developed alongside everyone else in your workplace.

8) “People don’t really need to do too much reading or writing in this job. They can certainly manage without being good at maths and computers.”

Every job role in social care involves using and understanding information, and communicating effectively. This means that everyone working in social care needs good language and number skills to do their job well and to guarantee high quality care services.

Although being good at maths and computers might not seem as important as being able to communicate well, these skills are critical if care staff are to avoid wasting resources and ensure the safety of those they support.

“ A CSCI report in 2006 stated that nearly half of all nursing and care homes fail to meet national minimum standards on giving medication. The report described situations where people are given: the wrong medication, someone else’s medication, medication in the wrong doses and no medication at all. ”



You will find lots of examples that show the importance of reading, writing, maths and computer skills on pages 7 - 10 of this guide. It's also worth noting that many workers are still not confident with IT and so it could be a really good incentive to offer courses that combine literacy or numeracy with IT skills.

By 2010, 90% of all UK jobs will require level 2 skills. By 2020, over 40% of all UK jobs will need to be degree equivalent and above.

9) "I know some of my staff struggle with writing, but I don't know how to bring the subject up without upsetting them. It's very uncomfortable."

The most important thing is to make sure you approach the subject in a very positive way. The language you use really can make all the difference.

Adopting a 'whole organisation approach to skills for life' is also a good way of reducing stigma. This involves skills for life development for all staff regardless of their role or level in the workplace.

Make skills for life a routine part of recruitment and induction so that everyone goes through the same process and no one feels singled out. Bring in specialists who are used to handling this sensitive area of work. Enlist the help of Union Learning representatives to offer valuable peer support and encouragement.

Employees value skills for life training. According to a Business in the Community survey of employees who had undertaken skills for life training:
79% said that it helps them to do their jobs better.
86% would recommend their training to a friend or colleague.
78% now felt encouraged to continue learning.

10) "I don't know where to start. The funding seems complicated and I don't know where to find the right type of training."

There really are lots of useful resources and sources of help for skills for life development – so many it's overwhelming!

Don't be put off by the paperwork and bureaucracy as this can often be taken care of by others, such as the Train to Gain service or the local college.

For an overview of the help available and guidance on where to start, see the next section of this guide from page 21 onwards.



hear from those who have already done it

move on carefully

A partnership approach supports skills for life in Cumbria.

Care Sector Alliance Cumbria joined forces with others in the North West to develop a partnership approach to skills for life. A wide range of partners took part including Move On, NHS and Unionlearn.

They created training programmes set in a social care context. The programmes were split into modules so that different organisations had the flexibility to deliver them in different ways. Learners were offered an enjoyable and relevant learning experience and the chance to achieve a national qualification (certificate in Adult Literacy or Numeracy).

Some 120 health and social care workers joined the pilot programmes which were widely viewed as a great success. Employers and employees reported increased confidence and competence in the workplace and for those who took the national tests, the achievement rate was around 90% (well above the national average).

The programme has been developed further within Cumbria, and similar models have also been tried in other regions and sectors. Care Sector Alliance Cumbria have also gone on to achieve 'winner of winners' at the Skills for Care Accolades 2008, celebrating best practice in social care workforce development.

fun with numbers

Care workers discover that developing number skills can be fun at Caring Sharing & Co Ltd.

Supervisors at Caring Sharing & Co Ltd had noticed that a number of care workers struggled with number skills in their day to day work. Staff were reluctant to take measurements, make estimates and record data for routine tasks such as monitoring fluid intake. As a result, case notes were inaccurate or lacking in detail and there was genuine concern that this could affect the quality of care.

Andrew Cowen (Director at Caring Sharing & Co Ltd) chose to tackle these concerns by introducing some workplace learning that was fun and highly relevant to the day to day work of everyone on the course. Andrew was very careful to avoid the use of the word 'maths' because he didn't want any of the staff to be put off by fear, or association with negative experiences in school. (Recent research shows that for people with poor numeracy, the biggest barrier to participation is fear rather than complacency).



Talking Healthcare

An English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) research project finds ways of improving recruitment into the care sector.

This research was carried out by London South Bank University, for the Healthcare ESOL Development Project. The project aimed to find ways of encouraging members of minority language communities to apply for jobs in health and social care. It was designed as a modular e-learning ESOL package with one module, Working in Healthcare, fully developed as the prototype.

The study supports existing research evidence which indicates that skills in English are a barrier to recruitment for members of minority language communities, particularly refugees and other migrants. These groups are often unable to find work, or take jobs that don't make use of their skills and qualifications.

Just 4% of those in the study had work experience in health and social care. However, after trialling the materials, almost 70% of the sample said they would be interested in applying for work in these sectors. Of these, 43% had said at the start of the study that they would not consider looking for work in health or social care.

This establishes a strong case for offering sector based ESOL teaching as a means of encouraging the recruitment of minority language communities into social care.

For further examples of skills for life making a difference in the workplace – see the ESOL Case Studies Booklet produced by the Department of Innovation, Universities & Skills

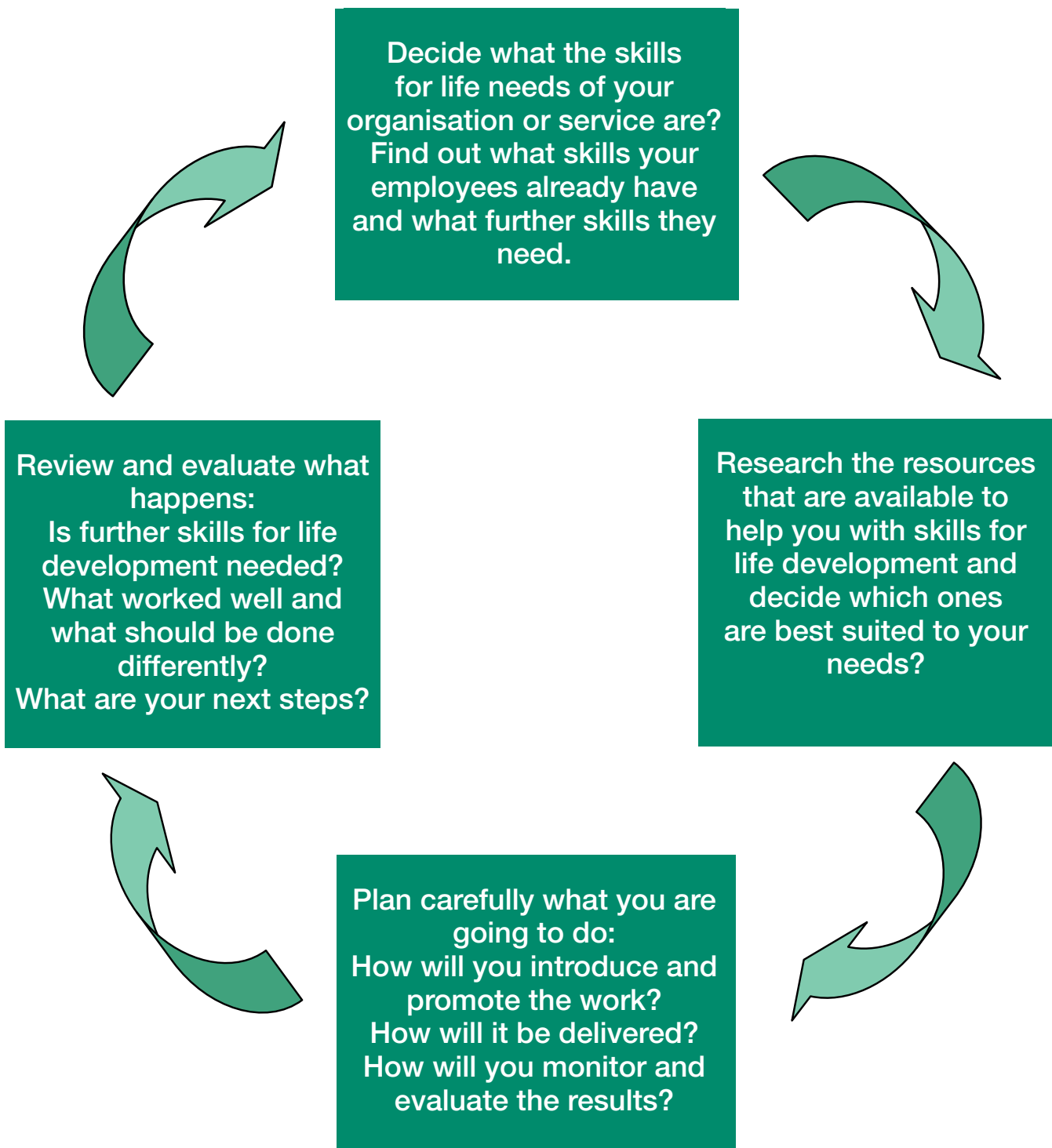
www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus.

Or visit the Skills Stories website www.skillstories.org.



what can employers do about skills for life?

manage skills for life in four steps





what funding and other help is available?

funding for skills for life training

Good skills for life training is expensive to deliver, but there is currently a lot of training that is free to the learner or employer because it is fully covered by public funding.

Further education colleges are often a good place for employers to start when looking for skills for life training. This is because they understand the funding systems and know how to get financial support for different types of training.

However, other local training providers may be more suitable, particularly if they are already delivering vocational training for you and so have knowledge of your organisation and of the care sector as a whole.

Although employers can access training on behalf of their staff, individual employees can also get free skills for life support through local community learning providers, learn-direct centres and colleges.

There is also a wide range of free informal learning resources that employers and employees can access via the internet, educational television and local library services.

Skills for Care have produced a guide to resources and funding for workforce development in adult social care. This is available in the funding section of www.skillsforcare.org.uk.

overview of current funding available through the learning and skills council for skills for life teaching

- Through the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funding there is an entitlement to free literacy and numeracy training for learners who have skills below the equivalent of a level 2 qualification in either of these subject areas.
- Where funding is accessed through the Further Education, Work Based Learning or Train to Gain routes, learners can get free literacy and numeracy support regardless of any vocational qualifications they might already have.
- Skills for life support may also be built in to level 2 vocational programmes for any learners that are assessed as needing to 'brush up' their literacy or numeracy skills, but not needing to achieve separate qualifications in these subjects.



- Employers with fewer than 50 full-time employees (or part-time equivalent) are eligible for a contribution to wage costs through Train to Gain. This is to cover time spent learning by any employees aiming to achieve their first full level 2 qualification and/or approved skills for life qualifications.
- Some people are entitled to free English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) training because they qualify for full fee remission under LSC funding guidance. In all other cases, employers (or sometimes learners) have to contribute to the cost of ESOL support. The level of this contribution is set to rise from 42.5% in 2008/9 to 50% by 2009/10.
- Employers can go direct to training providers or local colleges to arrange training or, where they don't have existing arrangements with local providers, they can contact the LSC for support from Train to Gain (or National Employer Service (NES) for large employers).
- For detailed advice on the financial support available, employers should contact their local LSC where they can then be referred to the NES or Train to Gain.

Please note that LSC funding criteria are complicated and different criteria apply in different circumstances. As they are also subject to change, you should always get up to date advice for your own particular circumstances.

types of training available

There are two main types of skills for life training:

1. Discrete programmes, where literacy, numeracy or English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) are taught as individual subjects.
2. Embedded programmes, where literacy, numeracy or ESOL are taught as part of other subject courses or within vocational programmes.

Training can take place in a range of venues such as colleges, community centres, work premises, training centres or online.

Some programmes will be very general and suitable for a range of learners. Others will be designed to meet the specific needs of a particular group or workplace.

Courses can be short or long and they can be held during the day or in the evening. With the increasing availability of online learning, it should be possible to timetable training around shift patterns and to arrange learning that fits with any individual time commitments that a particular employer or learner might have.



making sure you get the right type of training

It is very important that you know how to negotiate the best type of training for the particular needs of your employees and your organisation as good training can be expensive. Even if you can get fully funded training, you will still have some costs for arranging it and getting staff to attend.

You need to make sure the training is delivered at a time and place that suits your organisation. You also need to make sure that the subject material covered and the style of teaching is right for your learners. Where possible, try to make sure that skills for life is taught as an integral part of a vocational course. This is known as embedded learning and research shows that it works far better than separate learning.



DIUS research suggests that for people with poor numeracy, the biggest barrier to learning is fear rather than complacency.



Skills for Care has produced the Care Training Code guides to help any care worker taking or planning to take any work-related training.

There are four versions of the guide written for:

- Learners.
- Training and development providers.
- Purchasers of training and development.
- Individuals buying in training for their own staff.

For further information and to download the guides, go to www.skillsforcare.org.uk - they can be found in the publications section.

You can also download guidance on selecting a learning provider from the manage skills section of the Care Skillsbase website at www.scie-careskillsbase.org.uk.



NRDC research found that embedding leads to 16% higher retention and 26% higher success rates for level 2 vocational programmes.

Also, for fully embedded courses, 43% more learners achieved a literacy qualification and 23% more achieved a numeracy qualification.





skills for life qualifications

There are National Certificates in adult literacy and numeracy at entry level, level 1, and level 2 (learners need level 1 literacy to cope with a level 2 NVQ). There are also certificates in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) skills for life, and an ESOL for Work qualification.

The Move On website has lots of information about the tests and sample questions. It also has practice tests and a 'Find a Test Centre' facility. The website is www.move-on.org.uk.

Other skills for life qualifications are:

- Key Skills Application of Number and Communication (both at levels 1 and 2).
- GCSEs in English and Maths (both at levels 1 and 2).

Key Skills and GCSEs can't be funded through Train to Gain, though they are available to employers who wish to cover the costs in full.



where to start

Although there are many resources to help you manage skills for life development, we have picked out just three that we think are the best to make a start with.

Once you start exploring, you will come across links to lots of others and you can also check our references and resources guide for a broader list. Go to www.skillsforcare.org.uk for a copy of this guide - you will find it in the developing skills section.

1. For free web-based tools that help social care employers manage skills for life in the workplace, go to www.scie-careskillsbase.org.uk.

Care Skillsbase is the result of a joint project between the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) and Skills for Care.

It is a set of free, practical, web-based resources that help social care employers improve the communication and number skills of their staff.

2. For advice on funding for skills for life learning, contact your local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or go to www.lsc.gov.uk.

Learning and Skills Council (LSC) - The LSC is the non-departmental public body responsible for planning and funding education and training for all adults in England except those in universities. There is a national office in Coventry and nine regional offices that oversee the work of local partnership teams. The LSC provides funding for skills for life learning through a number of channels including the National Employer Service (NES) and Train to Gain.

National Employer Service (NES) www.nes.lsc.gov.uk - Set up by the LSC, the NES works strategically with large employers to meet their workforce development needs and represent their views in the skills policy agenda.

Train to Gain www.traintogain.gov.uk - Train to gain is a service run by the LSC that aims to help businesses improve their productivity and competitiveness by ensuring that staff have the right skills to do the best job. Train to Gain gives access to skills brokers who carry out a training needs analysis and help employers assess what skills their staff need now and in the future.



3. For a wide range of free resources for employers, learners and teachers, go to www.move-on.org.uk.

Move On is a government-funded project that encourages individuals to brush up their literacy and numeracy skills. The website has a positive tone that puts the emphasis on gaining qualifications and progressing rather than on peoples problems or gaps. The site is divided into different sections that provide resources aimed at learners, teachers and employers. There are also a number of resources on this site that are designed specifically for the care sector.

There is a campaign website at www.dfes.gov.uk/get-on/ with marketing information and resources for those involved in promoting skills for life learning. The site is aimed at providers, stakeholders, employers and the friends/family of potential learners.



getting your communication right

talking to your employees about skills for life needs

Less than a quarter of those with literacy or numeracy problems admit that they have difficulty with reading or numbers. Many have developed strategies that help them cope well both at home and in work. So, they might not realise that improving their skills could help them to do their jobs better and progress in their work and personal lives.

Employers and managers often feel uncomfortable about bringing up the subject of skills for life with the people they supervise. The best approach is usually to treat skills for life just like any other training need and to use positive language that emphasises 'improving skills' rather than 'sorting out problems'.

The Move-On website at www.moveon.org.uk has lots of resources that can help you take a positive approach to skills for life.

They recommend that you use language like:

- brush up / update / modernise your skills
- a great opportunity
- gain a certificate

and that you avoid language like:

- screening / testing
- worried about your career opportunities?
- let down by your English and maths skills?

You will also find practical advice and resources that will help you talk to your staff about skills for life on the Care Skillsbase website at www.scie-careskillsbase.org.uk.

working with union learning representatives

Union learning representatives have a significant role to play in engaging workers who might otherwise be reluctant to discuss their learning needs.

They are committed to encouraging learning and helping identify and promote learning activities in their workplace. Union learning representatives have been central to the setting up and success of many workplace skills for life courses and it is often these representatives who recruit learners and promote the importance of people improving their communication and number skills.



Union learning representatives are trained in their role and have ongoing opportunities for related learning. The union provides an additional source of communication and information about learning opportunities through its internal structures and communication channels. This may be particularly useful in reaching part-timers and shift workers.

For further information about working with union learning representatives, contact any trade union connected to your workplace or visit the Unionlearn website at www.unionlearn.org.uk.

To download a Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) publication that explores the benefits of working with trade union learning representatives, go to www.cipd.co.uk.



Why not set up an employee learning and development club?

You don't need a big budget to get started and you can get plenty of interest by using food or social events as a hook.

They can help to increase engagement in learning and remove some of the barriers. They are very useful if you want to create a learning culture in your workplace.



taking advantage of national campaigns

Larger organisations might decide to have a planned marketing campaign for skills for life development but small employers could get some free promotion by linking in to one of the many national campaigns.

- Did you know that Adult Learners' Week and Learning at Work Day are held during May each year? See www.learnersweek.org.uk and www.learningatworkday.com for more information.
- The Quick Reads initiative has already helped over 13,000 organisations to encourage their staff to benefit from the joys of reading. Go to www.niace.org.uk/quickreads for more information.
- Did you know that having a maths A-Level could increase earnings by £10,000 a year? There is a big national marketing campaign at the moment to encourage people to brush up on their number skills. Visit the campaign website at <http://geton.direct.gov.uk/> or look out for the adverts in national press and on TV.



making workplace communication clearer

As well as helping your employees to improve their communication and number skills through training, you can also help by making sure that all workplace communication is made as clear as possible and is presented in the best way.

People who lack confidence with communication and number skills are often faced with an immediate barrier if the written information they are given doesn't take account of their difficulties.

Written materials can be made much easier to read if you pay attention to the design, layout and readability.

When thinking about the design and layout:

- Avoid squeezing too much text on to the page and allow plenty of white space between columns, at margins and to separate sections.
- Use images to break up lengthy pieces of text or to aid understanding, but make sure the overall effect isn't too busy and avoid complicated graphs or charts that might be hard to interpret.
- Choose a clear type font and use large font sizes where possible, with 12-point as a minimum.
- Use bold text or larger font size to emphasise text instead of underlining, italics or reverse shading.

If you want to make the material you produce easier to read, pay attention to:

- sentence length.
- choice of words.
- readability tests.

There are a number of word processing packages that are now available to indicate the readability level of written material. One of these is SMOG, which stands for Simple Measure of Gobbledygook. This formula calculates readability using sentence and word length. A readability level of 10 will be able to be understood by most people, whereas a readability level of 14 is more suited to people with English language skills at level 2 or above. This document has a readability score of less than 14 throughout, and this particular page has a score of 12.9.

A free online SMOG calculator is available at www.wordscount.info.



Readability tests measure the features of text that can be calculated. They are useful as a quick, on-the-spot assessment tool to let the writer know that the writing is too dense. However, they cannot tell the writer how complex the ideas are, whether the vocabulary is appropriate for the audience or whether or not the content is in a logical order.

Further practical advice and guidance on making written communications clearer and easier to read is available from:

The Plain English Campaign.

<http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/index.htm>

Improvement and Development Agency for local government (IdeA.)

www.idea.gov.uk



support for people with dyslexia

The Disability Discrimination Act gives employers the responsibility of making 'reasonable adjustments' to accommodate the needs of dyslexic people.

Employers should therefore consider:

- Arranging a dyslexia assessment test for employees that think they might be affected.
- Changing the way that information is presented if this would help a dyslexic employee. For example, many people with dyslexia find it easier to read material printed on coloured paper than on white.
- Using training providers that can offer specialist support to dyslexic learners.

Note that although only some skills for life tutors will be dyslexia specialists, all should be aware of the indicators and know when and how to refer on. Learners should therefore be given understanding and support by any tutors they come into contact with.

Dyslexia is caused by differences in the brain structure and chemistry. It is a lifelong condition and is not related in any way to intelligence. It often runs in families and it affects men and women from all backgrounds.

Dyslexia can lead to difficulties with reading, writing, memory, organisational skills and the speed at which people process information. It can also lead to increased ability in skills such as problem solving, creativity, spatial awareness and holistic thinking.



**39.5% of adults whose skills are level 1 or below are likely to be dyslexic.
Dyslexia affects up to 10% of the population, with 4% having severe dyslexia.**



Further information, advice and support is available from:

Dyslexia Action www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk.

British Dyslexia Association www.bdadyslexia.org.uk.



support for migrant workers and overseas staff

With increasing numbers of migrant workers being recruited into the social care sector, it is more important than ever that employers offer the right kind of support from induction onwards. Here are 10 tips for supporting staff from other countries:

1. Assess language skills carefully at the recruitment stage, and then introduce intensive language skills training once employees start work.
2. Talk to existing staff, particularly supervisors and managers, before the new workers arrive. Careful preparation at this stage can help you to avoid numerous practical difficulties and can encourage positive working relationships.
3. Make sure you follow a well-structured induction programme that is suitable for migrant workers. There are lots of practical resources for dealing with English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) needs at the point of induction on the Care Skillsbase website at www.scie-careskillsbase.org.uk.
4. Compile information about the organisation including a plan of the building and policy/procedures handbook. Ensure that any documentation is written in plain English and is clear to follow. Be particularly careful to avoid euphemisms and other expressions that don't translate well to people whose first language isn't English. Use photographs and maybe some translated materials to aid understanding.
5. Spend the first day going through the job description, terminology and administration of your workplace. Give them a thorough tour introducing them to everyone, including staff and people who use services. This will enable them to start building relationships quickly. Make them feel part of the team immediately. Pair them up with a buddy to help with the new working practices and give general support.
6. Provide a welcome pack containing information about local facilities and services. You might include public transport, shops, restaurants and sports centres. Details of dentists, doctors, accommodation providers and specialist support groups could also be very helpful. Don't reinvent the wheel – see if the council or other organisations have already created one. The Improvement and Development Agency for local government have produced a guide that gives advice on providing information to migrants available to download at www.idea.gov.uk.
7. Provide access to television, radio and internet, including access to websites that offer information and support to migrant workers.



8. Encourage social and cultural integration with other staff, people who use services and local communities, perhaps by organising social events or work-based activities.
9. Commission further training, adapted to the specific needs of migrant workers. Ensure that ESOL support is embedded within vocational learning where possible.
10. Offer support and guidance at every step. Be patient, it may take some time for overseas staff to get used to the different working practices. Monitor how they are picking things up and go back over anything they are unsure about.

Some other resources that might help you to support workers whose first language isn't English:

British Council Learn English – the Learn English site of the British Council.
www.learnenglish.org.uk

BBC English as a Foreign Language – the BBC site for learning English.
www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish

Health and Safety Executive – site is available in various languages and it also provides translated information on health and safety in various languages that can be downloaded. There is also a telephone interpreting service that offers health and safety information in foreign languages – 0845 345 0055. www.hse.gov.uk

BBC foreign language pages – contains phrases and general language resources and includes games to improve learning and listening skills. www.bbc.co.uk/languages

English Language Centre Study Zone – a site with quizzes in reading, writing, listening, and speaking, with vocabulary and grammar. <http://web2.uvcs.uvic.ca/elc/studyzone/>

Website offering free downloads in 41 languages – vocabulary, phrases and pronunciation guide. www.byki.com

The Careers Advice Service has language lines that offer foreign nationals learning advice in their own language so they can get the skills they need to get the work they want. The service offers advice in the following languages:

- Farsi 0800 093 1116.
- French 0800 093 1115.
- Gujarati 0800 093 1119.
- Polish 0800 093 1114.
- Punjabi 0800 093 1333.
- Somali 0800 093 1555.
- Sylheti and Bengali 0800 093 1444.
- Urdu 0800 093 1118.



ICT is a skills for life too

Although information and communications technology (ICT) skills are included in the government's skills for life strategy, they have received far less attention than literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL).

However, having at least basic level ICT skills is now considered essential for the vast majority of jobs in the UK as well as for life in general.

Adults are interested in using computers to learn. 77% of those asked said they would like to work on a computer to improve their basic skills. Finding a course that includes ICT alongside basic skills may help motivate adults to sign up.

In recent years, the popularity of e-learning has grown enormously. More and more people have become aware of the benefits it can bring and have got used to it being a part of day to day life. Many courses are now delivered entirely online and increasingly e-learning elements are being added to the more traditional types of learning.



Skills for Care recommends that social care employers encourage the use of e-learning for their staff wherever possible. This helps to develop ICT skills as well as vocational skills and subject knowledge.



For general information, advice and support on developing ICT skills, you can go to local colleges, the Careers Advice Service or local training providers. Other resources that you might find useful are:

e-skills Passport - An online skills management system that helps you assess current IT skills and plan to improve them - www.e-skillspassport.com.

ITQ - A unique, flexible IT training and qualification programme, designed by employers to meet their needs - <http://itq.e-skills.com/>.

Business IT guide - A free service from e-skills UK to help smaller businesses increase their productivity and competitiveness through technology - www.businessitguide.com.



Not Safe for Work? - The Trade Union Congress (TUC) has teamed up with GetSafeOnline.org and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) to produce Not Safe For Work? This is a free online toolkit for staff.

The toolkit has video interviews from industry experts, quizzes and reading lists. It also offers a personalised prescription on internet security, tailored to an individual's internet usage.

As well as being used by many UK workers directly, it is hoped that employers will make time available for their staff to use the toolkit, as a kick-start into longer term plans for training in this area. www.worksmart.org.uk/nsfw

The document has a SMOG readability score of less than 14 throughout.

If you have any questions, comments or suggestions about the guide, please forward them to Helen Simpson at the address below or email helen.simpson@skillsforcare.org.uk

**Skills for Care
Albion Court
5 Albion Place
Leeds
LS1 6JL**

**telephone 0113 245 1716
fax 0113 243 6417
email info@skillsforcare.org.uk
web www.skillsforcare.org.uk**

© Skills for Care 2008