

Good Practice in Integrated and Standalone Numeracy Provision at Levels 1-3

Frequently Asked Questions

2021



Questions Relating to Numeracy Provision

1. Why do we need Guidelines on integrated and standalone numeracy in Further Education and Training (FET)? Don't practitioners already know what to assess and teach when working with adult learners at these levels?

Numeracy is often regarded as a sub-area of literacy and can, as a result, be subsumed into literacy and numeracy programmes designed for adult learners at levels 1-3. This research endorses the notion that there is merit in designing numeracy-specific assessment and teaching materials. For example, some people who seem to make good progress with general reading and writing can struggle when presented with the terms used to teach numeracy and/or mathematics for everyday application. The research also emphasises that there is a need to consider affective learner concerns, such as fear and shame around numeracy, when designing numeracy programmes going forward.

2. In which areas of FET provision should the numeracy assessment described in the Guidelines be implemented?

Research has shown that learners in need of additional numeracy supports are engaged in learning across the full range of NFQ Levels which span the Further Education and Training system. If numeracy needs go unnoticed at the foundational levels, there is evidence to suggest that this can permeate the learning experiences of those who progress onto FET programmes at the higher end of NFQ provision (levels 4, 5 and up to 6.)

3. How do these Guidelines on numeracy practice differ from those we already carry out for QQI programmes, in Maths and Communications, for example?

QQI assessments are designed to lead to an award, whereas the numeracy report and guidelines are designed to *support and augment teaching and learning*. This approach focuses on how well students can apply the relevant numeracy skills in real life, after encountering them in the familiar context of their FET programme. This could involve tutors not only assessing knowledge and skills, but also other aspects of real-life application, such as confidence and independence.

4. We provide many numeracy-related programmes, at different levels. How can we use the same approach to numeracy provision and assessment when our learning contexts are so varied?

The Guidelines support a flexible approach to numeracy provision and assessment which can be adapted to suit the circumstances of your centre and students. So, although concepts are common to all ETBs, the *content, timing and materials* are sourced locally, to suit the needs of the context. Learning approaches can be decided locally, possibly with input from course tutors. There should also be scope, in time, for approaches and resources to be shared across ETBs.

5. The researchers have captured some interesting findings in terms of current numeracy practice across the ETBs. How can I be confident that these findings are relevant to the work my colleagues and I engage in within our own classroom environments?

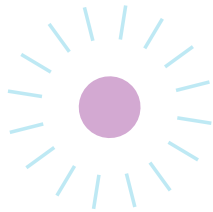
Numeracy tutors and their managers alike can have confidence in the research methodology employed in the development of these guidelines. All group and individual interview responses were collated, deidentified and transcribed in order to ensure participant anonymity. Interview transcriptions were analysed and presented thematically in order to map out the key research questions of relevance to advancing numeracy provision, in light of the originally posed questions, whilst being cognisant of potential future FET sector strategic demands. This project was overseen by the ETBI National Advisory Committee on Language, Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy and all drafts reviewed for relevance and applicability to teaching and learning situations in Further Education and Training.

6. The research talks about the need for both the necessary skills and attitude for numeracy provision. Does this mean that tutors need to have third-level qualifications in mathematics to deliver numeracy?

While undergraduate / graduate qualifications in mathematics are not necessary for the teaching of mathematics, it is essential that tutors are confident in the subject area and have a good grounding in the language of numeracy and the key concepts that need to be addressed in numeracy provision. The sharing of good practice across and within ETBs is proposed as a useful way to assist with any areas of numeracy where tutors need some additional support. As stated in the research, along with the necessary technical understanding of concepts, an ability to relate to the affective aspects of engaging with learning is of equal importance, as is the ability to relate to the needs and goals of the learner.

7. As a subject tutor, how can I prepare to support students with any numeracy difficulties that might arise in my course?

As an expert in your field, you are best placed to identify the numeracy demands of your subject, including the skills needed to use tools and materials in the context of your FET programme. You can work with the resource person and/or the adult literacy service to clarify the specific numeracy demands your students are likely to meet. The literacy and numeracy support staff can give you tips on how you can assist learners in handling those demands. They can also point you towards short or longer-term training programmes in Integrating Literacy/Numeracy, if you would like to take this any further.



Questions Relating to Assessment

8. What methods of assessment do the Guidelines support?

Numeracy assessment in FET can involve a number of steps, including an *initial interview*, plus a *performance task* for initial assessment; and *performance tasks* for ongoing assessment. The initial interview may be an individual meeting, but this is not necessarily always the case. The interview could also be carried out as part of a group meeting, provided this is in the best interests of all learners participating. Some centres include numeracy assessment as part of routine, introductory group activities and events, such as open days, Induction Programmes, Learning to Learn Programmes or other introductory sessions. There is flexibility for management and staff in individual ETBs and centres to decide how best to fit this into the local learning environment.

9. What would a performance task assessment method involve?

A performance task is a meaningful activity which allows learners to demonstrate their numeracy strengths and support needs. Performance tasks are developed or sourced by the centre and may be built around real-life activities such as induction topics, or elements of course work, or any other topic of interest to the learner.

10. How are assessment results recorded?

In the case where there is initial and ongoing assessment of numeracy, the recording templates recommended in Good Practice Guidelines for the Initial and Ongoing Assessment of Literacy and Numeracy at levels 1-3 in ETBs may be useful.

11. I have reservations about using set forms to record the results. Can we continue to use our own recording documentation instead?

The supplied recording instruments represent an opportunity for ETBs to address integrated and standalone numeracy assessment and practice consistently across locations and programmes. The guidelines are based on good practice encountered in ETBs and, therefore, should be reflective of approaches already in place. Using the supplied numeracy guidelines, along with the recording tools provided in Good Practice Guidelines for the Initial and Ongoing Assessment of Literacy and Numeracy at levels 1-3 in ETBs can be considered by staff in ETBs and will ensure consistency of approach across and within ETBs, which ultimately benefits the learner.

It is envisaged that widespread and consistent use of the guidelines will:

- (a) highlight key elements of numeracy which are essential for real-life application of skills, appropriate to adult learners at NFQ Levels 1-3;
- (b) ensure a common understanding of the different elements involved in numeric/mathematic competence;
- (c) inform SOLAS /ETBI of any revisions needed to the guidelines and provide important feedback based on practical experience of using them.

12. Where and how should these records of results be stored? What is the procedure?

Storage of learner records will be subject to local storage and security procedures already in place in ETBs. This includes ensuring compliance with the requirements of GDPR and in the context of blended learning, maintaining the storage of documentation securely online.

13. Can we record progress online, instead of using a paper version of forms provided in the Good Practice Guidelines for the Initial and Ongoing Assessment of Literacy and Numeracy at levels 1-3 toolkit?

Currently it is not possible to record the assessment results online, however, this facility may become available in the future.

14. Our ETB Further Education and Training centre provides many programmes and caters for hundreds of learners. It isn't practical for us to meet every student before they start their numeracy course. What can we do about initial assessment if we can't conduct an initial interview?

As noted in answer 8 above, the initial interview need not necessarily be an individual meeting. Large centres may incorporate numeracy assessment into their routine induction activities. Management and staff in individual ETBs and centres are free to decide how best to fit this into the local learning environment.

15. Who is best placed to carry out assessment of numeracy programmes in FET?

Initial Assessment:

Depending on staffing, resources and recruitment procedures, assessment may be carried out by a programme coordinator, course tutor and/or resource person as part of an individual or a group meeting. In some centres, the adult literacy service and/or guidance staff may have a role. ETBs and centre managers work with staff to identify who takes on particular roles in assessment.

Ongoing Assessment:

The course tutor is best placed to observe how learners are managing the numeracy demands of the course, on a day-to-day basis, with the support of resource staff and/or the adult literacy service.

16. I am a subject tutor, not a numeracy expert. How can I get involved in assessing those skills, if this isn't my area of expertise?

It is important that assessment procedures organised at centre level ensure adequate support for subject tutors when they are observing how learners are managing the numeracy embedded within their subject. Depending on local structures, this may involve a resource worker and/or the adult literacy service. It may also be beneficial for tutors to engage in some basic training which could provide valuable insight into the kind of numeracy difficulties that can arise, and ways of handling those within the subject context.

17. As a FET subject tutor, my first responsibility is to cover a demanding curriculum and support my students in achieving their QQI award. How can I find the time to include even more assessment of numeracy, on top of everything else? Won't that take time out of our coursework?

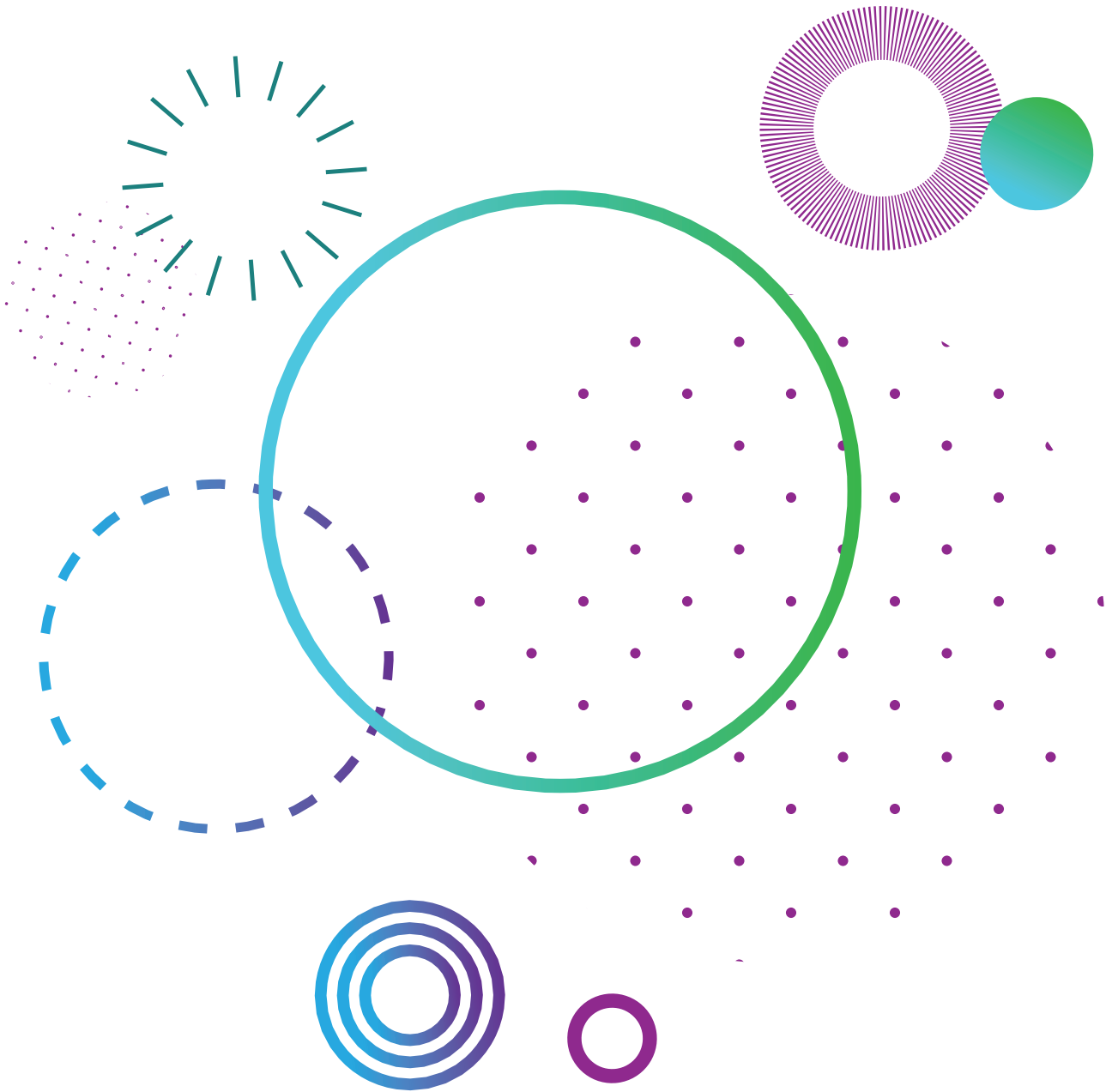
Students' progress on numeracy in the subject does need to be assessed explicitly, but that does not mean it has to be separate from, or in addition to, coursework. In fact, it is better if ongoing assessment of numeracy happens *during* the regular classwork. If you have a good idea of the numeracy demands of your subject (see 16 above) you, and/or the resource tutor, will be in a good position to notice when people are managing, and when additional help is required.

18. Why are technology and digital literacy not included in the range of numeracy skills to be assessed?

Definitions of 'literacy' are rapidly expanding to include many aspects of digital literacy, and the use of technology as a problem-solving tool was an important element of the last PIAAC report. The development of digital skills is emphasised in the latest Further Education and Training Strategy 2020-2024. There is scope for future work on the development of digital skills to draw on the already published good practice guidelines on initial and ongoing assessment.

19. Will the results I record for integrated and standalone programmes be used for accountability purposes by SOLAS or any other government agency, e.g. to judge the success of a programme, of teaching or to influence funding?

No. The purpose and use of the system described in these guidelines is to support teaching and learning.



SOLAS – An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna

Further Education and Training Authority
Block 1, Castleforbes House
Castleforbes Road
Dublin 1
D01 A8N0
Ireland

T: +353 (0)1 533 2500
E: info@solas.ie
www.solas.ie