Effective Practice Guidelines (EPGs)
for assessment and tracking in maths and English

Who is responsible for initial/diagnostic assessment and tracking?

1) **Everyone with responsibility for learners should actively promote the relevance and value of maths and English**, in relation to vocational learning and assessment and future personal (economic and social) success.

Managers, practitioners, employers and learners must be clear about the impact of maths and English on learners' future economic and social success, and the 'ripple effect' on learners' families and the communities in which they live and work.

This will require a clear expectation, unequivocally stated by senior leaders and effectively communicated to all stakeholders and learners.

Providers will need to explore how best to encourage the active involvement of employers, where relevant.

Organisational considerations:

Managers need to be confident and assertive in explaining and arguing why maths and English are important. The following questions may be helpful.

1. What is the value of maths and English in relation to learners' -

   - progress, vocationally or academically?
   - future social and economic success?
   - family, now, in the future and through future generations?
   - community?
   - peers, following the same vocational programme?
   - employer?
   - teacher/trainer/tutor?
   - provider institution?

2. Does your organisation have a clearly-stated aspiration (e.g. a vision statement) with regards to maths and English – and if not, what do you need to do about it?

3. How do you ensure that your practitioners (e.g. teachers, trainers, assessors, learning support staff, etc) fully understand this aspiration and actively promote it?

4. How do you involve employers (where necessary) in reinforcing this aspiration?

2) Effectively engage all relevant professionals (e.g. vocational, specialist and learning support practitioners) to support assessment, according to their expertise, including feedback from those in the workplace where possible and appropriate.

All professionals who work with a learner must assume some responsibility for supporting 'Assessment for Learning'. Feedback that is situated at the point of learning has far more impact than that given at a later point.

The nature of the support given will depend on the expertise and capacity of the professional involved and managers should consider how to facilitate infrastructures of support throughout the entire 'chain' of provision.

Providers should therefore consider the range of professionals who are available to support the learner's development in maths and English, and the parameters within which this can and should take place.

Organisational considerations:

Assessment for Learning (AfL) does not always require specialist subject knowledge on the part of the professional working with a learner. For example, a work-based supervisor who also lacks confidence and competence in maths and English can still *monitor* when a learner may need support in those skill areas – given the right working relationship.

AfL starts with the observation, or knowledge, that the learner is able to engage with activities: *no engagement* equals *no learning*. *Monitoring* engagement is the first tool that anyone can use (including learners, themselves) without having to have specialist knowledge.

Some professionals who work with the learner may comfortably go further by *evaluating* the nature of the learning barrier – or may prefer to pass this onto a colleague with greater skills and knowledge in that context.

It can be enough for the provider institution to know that the learner is avoiding (or struggling with) certain tasks and that this needs to be followed up; and this is one example of how the purpose of AfL is different to that of 'testing' which does require specialist tools or knowledge – AfL supports learning whilst it is happening, whilst testing can only do that retrospectively.

The key point here, and possibly the most important, is that **learning barriers are flagged-up as they occur, and are dealt with or referred on, immediately** – and all professionals working with the learner, including work-based supervisors, have a role to play in this. Managers need to define these responsibilities and enable communication processes that facilitate rapid referral and information sharing.

3) Require and equip learners to monitor and evaluate their learning, as it happens - enabling the practitioner to review, guide and support learning activity, individually or in groups.

Learners need to know that they are 'doing it right' and making progress in every learning activity. 'Knowledge of results' is intrinsic to learning and therefore assessment cannot be a 'bolt-on activity', occurring only as a retrospective evaluation at the 'end of learning'.

Learners' engagement in assessment and review enables them to see, more clearly, how they are overcoming obstacles and achieving incremental steps towards agreed learning goals. When learners record their own progress, reflecting on experiences of overcoming difficulties, this challenges negative self-perceptions of inadequacy. This process increases resilience, self-belief/efficacy and a positive self-image in respect of maths and English.

Teachers will need to help learners (and ESOL learners, in particular) to develop the skills to monitor and evaluate their learning and to avoid beliefs about their learners that may limit expectations in this respect. Provider organisations should consider how digital and mobile technologies could facilitate assessment processes for both learners and teachers. SEND providers and teachers will need to consider the extent to which their learners can engage meaningfully in their own assessment.

Organisational considerations:

Assessment for Learning (AfL), and the process of it, is either explicit or implicit in each of these Effective Practice Guidelines. This guideline emphasises the learner's' role in monitoring and evaluating learning (themselves, or as peers), as two essential processes of AfL. *Monitoring* and *evaluation* require (only) that we can be sure that learners are (a) engaging with the learning activity and (b) if not, why not?

Requiring learners to actively track and record their learning progress (see also EPGs 9 and 11), ensures their engagement in monitoring and evaluation and, of course, the learning itself (or places lack of engagement 'on record'). This removes a significant burden on the teacher for record keeping and leaves them to circulate, engage with learners and to facilitate this process. The teacher also has more time to record brief notes ('float and note') for a later *review* (whole group, small group or individual).

Underpinning this process, is the confidence of the teacher to rely on their subject expertise to respond to issues arising with learners rather than to project a pre-prepared 'teaching script' onto them. Further, it should be noted that this approach in no way precludes the achievement of pre-planned learning aims as outlined within the Scheme of Work (but will, likely require that to be a flexible, 'working' document).

Who is responsible for initial/diagnostic assessment and tracking?

> **4)** **Review (and/or validate) a learner's strengths and learning support needs** through direct interaction with relevantly qualified and experienced education practitioners, particularly as a supplement to paper-based, or IT-supported, testing.

Effective reviews of learning capability and learning need, and particularly at the early stages of the learning programme, require specialist expertise to monitor and evaluate learners through observation and dialogue. This process requires contact with the learner over a period of time rather than as a one-off event.

Formal testing may be counter-productive with learners who have become test-averse, impacting negatively on the learner's expectations motivation and particularly so during early contact with the provider institution.

For assessment to be effective, it should involve specialist maths and English staff so they can diagnose why learners have arrived at their answers/ responses. It is important to know why learners struggle to do something and not just if they are able to achieve a particular test or not (e.g. English miscue analysis or identifying maths misconceptions).

It follows that providers need access to experienced and qualified maths and English specialists and to make efficient use of their time in support of learners and colleagues.

Organisational considerations:

Reviewing is a process in which practitioners **with subject and curriculum expertise** help learners to make sense of where they are on their learning journey and what the next steps (learning goals) should be. It happens when a specialist practitioner takes time with the learner to 'take stock', re-energise and, sometimes, realign learning to achieve the next goal.

Testing, may be useful in providing a 'snapshot' overview of current knowledge, understanding and skills, but it can also be a 'blunt instrument' in:

● unnecessarily testing beyond the issues that are currently in focus (and unnecessary testing can be damaging to learners' motivation and esteem);

● identifying the point in the learning process where learning became blocked or misconceived.

'Testing' can, at best, support an expert **review** of learning achievement, but is less likely to provide valid and reliable **evaluation** of the process of learning.

What should be involved in undertaking assessment and tracking?

> 5) **Consider all assessment**, whether initial, diagnostic or formative, **as fundamentally the same <u>process</u>**, with the same purpose (namely, Assessment <u>for</u> Learning).

It is no longer helpful to define assessment by discrete stages. It is more helpful to regard assessment as continuing cycles of reviewing, monitoring and evaluating learning, which are fully situated in the 'needs of the moment'. The purpose of assessment in this context is always to empower the learner to progress further and to reinforce self-belief/efficacy and build resilience.

It should also be noted that 'reviewing' is qualitatively different to 'assessing' (which is essentially a process of 'monitoring' and evaluating' progress in learning). These process steps can be summarised as follows.

Reviewing (1)*: what has been achieved so far and what further support may be needed?*

Reviewing (2) - Goal Setting*: agreeing the next stage of learning and defining meaningful goals.*

Learning Activity (ideally, requiring active engagement)

Monitoring*: is the learner engaging (or able to engage) with the learning activity?*

Evaluating*: is the learner learning the right things, in the right way, and are blocks to learning being identified and overcome?*

From the perspective of a 'process' view, it is apparent that Initial Assessment is fundamentally a 'review' process that may be supplemented by further engaged learning, monitoring, evaluation and review to validate prior achievement and to determine learning priorities.

Organisational considerations:

An over-emphasis on the 'stages of assessment' can easily obscure an understanding of assessment as a **process**, and one which is **intrinsic** to 'learning itself' rather than a **retrospective** 'test' of the 'results of learning'.

Conversely, an understanding of the process of assessment (for learning) is helpful in reimagining assessment as pivotal at all stages of the learning journey.

What should be involved in undertaking assessment and tracking?

6)	**Limit the amount and level of assessment to that which is essential for current goal setting** and particularly in the initial stage of the learner's journey.

Avoid unnecessary testing. It is not necessary to assess the full breadth of learners' mathematical/English abilities at the start of their programmes. It is also no longer necessary for every learner to have their level assessed for screening purposes because, for some learners, their goal (e.g. a GCSE) is already set.

At early points in the learner journey, the focus of review may be on prior achievement and current motivational orientation. Later, knowledge, understanding and skills requirements are likely to be more finely detailed as the learning programme becomes more 'advanced'.

Organisational considerations:

There is considerable evidence now that over-assessing (assessing more widely and deeply than what is **currently** required) is likely to impair learners' motivation and self-esteem. This has implications for both the ethos and the methodology of assessment.

The Ethos Issue: (a) is there a belief that comprehensive assessment is more efficient and effective than 'just-in-time' assessment and (b) is its purpose more aligned to MIS or learners' needs?

The Methodology Issue: should assessment be a 'bolt-on'/extrinsic and periodic process or a 'built-in'/intrinsic and continuous process.

Basing a learner's entire learning programme on the results of a one-off, fully comprehensive Initial Assessment is arguably akin to long-range weather forecasting and likely to be as inaccurate and unreliable.

What should be involved in undertaking assessment and tracking?

> **7) Ensure that assessment and regular reviews address learners' self-belief and motivation** alongside their subject knowledge and abilities in maths and English.

> *Learning may be blocked at any point by a lack of prior knowledge, understanding and/or skills. It is, however, also essential to know when blocked learning is the result of low self-belief and repeated failures to deal with 'setbacks', resulting in anxiety and poor motivation. This is a common issue in relation to maths and English.*

Organisational considerations:

Do your teaching, assessment and learning-support colleagues have the confidence and skills to identify, support or refer issues relating to learners' anxiety, low self-belief and poor motivation?

EPG 3 emphasised how learner engagement in **monitoring** and **evaluating** their progress (through recording/tracking) supports progress and motivation. The converse of this is that an absence of (recorded) progress is a clear sign of blocked-learning and points to the need for an ad-hoc **review** of the situation with the learner. Learning involves both the cognitive and affective (emotional) domains [Brandes and Ginnis (1986)[1]] and we need to remember that learners (of all ages) experience education emotionally as well as cognitively. Effective questioning and **active-listening** enable the practitioner to **review** the causes of 'blocked learning' - ideally, 'at the time', whilst other learners are actively engaged in problem-centred learning, or very soon after, at the 'earliest opportunity'.

The emotional factors that underpin learning and assessment are generally well-known, such as –

- fear of failure or ridicule;

- fear of change (learning always means leaving the 'comfort zone', doing things differently or thinking about things differently) …. it is a process of 'change' which may in itself provoke anxiety;

- lack of self-belief or self-efficacy [Bandura (1986)[2]] leading to low expectations of success, a lack of resilience when faced with failures/set-backs and low self-esteem;

- the learning outcome is perceived as lacking of relevance or personal importance.

All of the above will likely impair motivation, engagement and achievement.

[1] Brandes, D. and Ginnis, P. (1986) *A Guide to Student Centred Learning*. Oxford: Blackwell

[2] Bandura, A. (1986) The explanatory and predictive scope of self-efficacy theory. Journal of Clinical and Social Psychology, 4, 359-373

What should be involved in undertaking assessment and tracking?

> **8) Safeguard learners' self-confidence and independence in learning by identifying capability and strengths,** and providing scaffolded guidance on the next steps to build on this foundation.

> *Reviews must avoid a 'deficit' or 'medical model' (i.e. diagnosing / screening for 'needs') and the tendency to stereotype learners. It should affirm current proficiency and set targets that, whilst challenging, lead to cycles of success rather than repetitive cycles of failure. This enables learners to build self-belief/efficacy.*
>
> *Effective and timely intervention, when learning is "off mark" or "falling short", should focus on positive strategies to correct and redirect learners towards achievement in order to build future resilience.*

Organisational considerations:

In relation to learning and assessment, a **review** (literally, from its Latin root) 'looks again' at:

- what has been achieved so far (based on the learner's **monitoring** and **evaluation** of the learning experience and its outcome);
- what remains to be accomplished (as above);
- any issues arising that require action and agreement on the necessary next steps.

Each of these three components of a review require the practitioner to be sensitive to the potential affective (emotional) impact on the learner.

What has been accomplished: even positive feedback needs to be critically objective and **must** relate to specified learning outcomes and learning process rather than learner, as personal attribution [note, Dweck (2006)[1]]
"*Your final calculations are accurate and your approach to solving this problem is quite creative", rather than, "You can be very good at calculating and this shows that you are quite creative".*

What remains to be achieved: although this may be construed as negative feedback, it can still be delivered in a positive way.
"*If you can just work on checking your calculations at key stages so that your overall result is correct*" rather than, *"You don't seem able to see where you are going wrong, and that means you are getting wrong all of the time*".

Next steps: these need to within the learner's scope and make sense to them.
"*Try the next example, but this time plan out how you will check your results, and I'll come back and look at it in a few minutes*", rather than, "*See if you can do it better in the next example*".

[1]Dweck, C.S. (2006) Mindset: the new psychology of success. New York: Ballantine Books

How should assessment and tracking be used?

> 9) **Allocate time within sessions** for learners to:
> - record and reflect on the purpose and personal implications of their learning goals;
> - monitor and evaluate their own progress and to seek help when needed;
> - update **personal progress records** (tracking) and for practitioners to review and validate these.

Assessment (monitoring, evaluation and review of learning) is, in itself, an integral learning strategy, facilitating deeper learning in the moment – as opposed to creating notes for (in the hope of) later learning, or even homework. Adequate time must be allocated within a learning session to allow this to happen.

The practitioner's role (and expertise) should focus on checking learner progress evaluations and guiding learning rather than being the sole source and medium for knowledge and skills.

Organisational considerations:

EPG 3 advocated the need for a learner-led process of **monitoring** and **evaluating** learning. A small minority of practitioners may feel that this wastes valuable teaching time and is only of bureaucratic value. In reality, giving learners time to reflect on, and to track, their learning gives them greater confidence and leads to deeper learning (essential for problem solving in unfamiliar contexts) and increased learner autonomy.

Most important of all, learner-led **monitoring** and **evaluation** is the most efficient method of qualifying and quantifying both progress and problems in learning, at any given point within the learning process. When appropriately skilled practitioners **review** and validate this information in dialogue with learners, this then becomes the most reliable method of (a) supporting progress and achievement for **all** learners and of (b) obtaining valid data to support the quality of teaching and learning. With the relevant information easily and instantly accessible, **reviewing** progress with learners becomes a highly efficient process and made even more so when learners are engaged in active, problem-centred learning, leaving the practitioner to interact in a more learner-centred way.

Processes and procedures are only bureaucratic if we make them so, and this typically only happens when they:

- are imposed from the top-down and lack the involvement of the end-users (learners and practitioners) at the design stage;
- are insufficiently piloted, reviewed and revised, where necessary;
- concentrate, unnecessarily, on format rather than on outcomes.

EPG 11 provides further guidance on the purpose and outcomes of a learner-led tracking system.

How should assessment and tracking be used?

10) Embed or contextualise assessment in authentic/realistic, real-work/ life contexts.

Engagement in maths and English needs to be meaningful in relation to learners' individual real-work and real-life experience and personal goals. It also needs to be relevant to the current stage of their learning journey (i.e. building, incrementally, on what has gone before and laying the foundation for the next stages of the journey – and with the goal always in clear view.) This is an essential part of fostering learners' expectations of success and achievement (i.e. motivation).

This guideline should also be considered as the 'default position' in respect of SEND learners.

Organisational considerations:

Maths and English assessment (and, of course, learning) needs to be embedded or authentically contextualised because it is:
- more relevant for the learner (it's not just a 'motivational thing', but also about a 'constructivist approach' to build learning from the **familiar** to the **new**).
- more relevant to current practices in the workplace or the world at large.
- an expectation (like it or not) of Ofsted and current policy drivers such as CAVTL.

Maths and English are already **embedded,** to varying degrees, (*naturally occurring*) in all aspects of work and life and the issue for provider organisations and practitioners is how do **specialist practitioners** exploit this naturally occurring resource. Provider institutions might consider:

- can Schemes of Work be co-designed with employers and vocational practitioners?
- are learners able to bring real work/life maths and English into the classroom?
- can 'boundary workers' such as assessors support employer-provider cooperation in identifying and creating meaningful assessment opportunities?
- what protocols of communication and information sharing would be necessary to support any, or all, of the above?

It is unlikely that all of the required maths and English outcomes can be achieved in this way, but opportunities to exploit and enrich naturally occurring maths and English are often overlooked due to poorly developed employer-provider relationships. Such an approach will however challenge 'one-size-fits-all' curriculum models, delivered in a predetermined linear fashion.

It is also essential that managers challenge the mistaken belief that practitioners must create lots of set-piece assessments, based on extensive research in vocational contexts with which they are not professionally acquainted. Apart from anything else, this would imply a periodic, 'bolted-on' approach to assessment rather than 'built-in' Assessment for Learning.

How should assessment and tracking be used?

> **11) Learners should use their *personal progress records* to support and record regular reviews**, as a 'living' and continually evolving 'plan for learning' that is learner-led, but teacher-supported and validated.

A 'personal progress record' must be a 'living' and evolving document rather than a static plan that is fixed at the start of the learner's journey, as might be implied by the term 'Individual Learning Plan'. The learner's personal progress record (however it may be called) should fulfil the role of a continually updated plan for learning, recording iterative cycles of assessment, review and goal setting. It should be 'owned' and maintained by the learner with the support of the practitioner.

Ideally, it should be expressive, engaging, quick to up-date and (importantly) instantly accessible, enabling practitioners and learners to view progress in seconds and to review it, in minutes. It should also ensure that 'end goals' are always in sight.

Successful learner engagement will depend, in a large part, on:
a) *an explicit, and non-negotiable, requirement for learners (including with SEND learners, wherever possible) to assume responsibility for maintaining this record;*
b) *the format, medium and design of this record meeting the needs of both learners and practitioners.*

Managers, practitioners and learners (together) should consider how information and communication technologies might support the creation and maintenance of the personal progress record. They might also consider how learners can personalise this process whilst maintaining ease of use and accessibility for all stakeholders.

Organisational considerations:

The requirement for learners to use a **Personal Progress Record** (or by whatever name you prefer*) to **monitor** and **evaluate** their learning (see EPG 3), should be written into their learning contract. Further, learners are more likely to feel they have an investment in this process if they are able to design the format, media and 'look' of it. It must however be capable of quick and easy maintenance by the learner, and be instantly accessible for the practitioner when *reviewing* progress - or the reasons for a lack of it - and agreeing and recording learning goals.

*Individual Learning Plan/Programme; Personal Learning Plan; etc

How should assessment and tracking be used?

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12) Practitioners should use *personal progress records* to:
- review and agree learners' individual learning goals;
- review own delivery strategies for individuals or groups of learners;
- identify learners at risk of falling behind, support referrals and to aggregate progress and achievement data for MIS purposes.

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A continually updated (i.e. 'real-time') record of learner progress:
- *ensures current, valid and reliable information on learner progress and support needs;*
- *supports meaningful and purposeful reviews, based on real-time monitoring and evaluation;*
- *enables practitioners to engage the learner in setting differentiated learning goals;*
- *supports quick, real-time, evaluation of risk in relation to individuals or groups of learners (e.g. by RAG rating) and subsequent referral for support from other learning professionals and/or managers;*
- *enables the maintenance of 'up-to-the-minute', MIS data on learner progress and at-risk individuals and groups.*

Organisational considerations:

Practitioners will need to establish their own ways to 'lift' important individual learner information (e.g. causes for concern, additional support needs, etc) from personal progress records and into a centralised record of priorities for action, which may include:
- referral to colleagues;
- revising or differentiating planned learning activities;
- discrete (rather than embedded/ad hoc) review sessions;
- supporting learners who are 'at-risk' (in any sense);
- compilation of whole class progression data - or in respect of designated sub-groups (e.g. protected characteristics).

Provider organisations will need to consider how to use the upward flow of information from personal progress records to ensure that organisation-level management information is (very) current, valid and reliable.