Don't get by get on

Good Practice Guidelines

In Screening and Initial Assessment

For literacy, language and numeracy teachers, subject support staff and adult learner supporters

department for education and skills

read·write·plus

Skills for Life: the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills

Many millions of adults in England need help to improve their literacy, language and numeracy skills. *Skills for Life*, launched by the Prime Minister in 2001, sets out the Government's strategy, which aims to help 2.25 million learners gain a national qualification by 2010.

Since 2001, a massive 2.4 million adults across England have taken up 4.8 million courses in literacy, language and numeracy skills. Over 750,000 of these learners have gone on to achieve nationally recognised qualifications – a commitment set out by the Government in the *Skills for Life* strategy.

Since the launch of *Skills for Life*, we have gained an even greater insight into the effect low levels of literacy and numeracy skills have on individuals, their families, on the economy and on society. For example, adults with poor literacy and numeracy skills could earn up to £50,000 less over their lifetime and are more likely to have health problems, to live in a disadvantaged area or to be unemployed. They and their children risk being cut off from the benefits of a world increasingly linked through information technology. Additionally, poor literacy, language and numeracy skills have been estimated to cost the country in excess of £10 billion a year.

Skills for Life is an ambitious strategy that is designed to address literacy, language and numeracy needs of adults and young people. It covers all post-16 learners on learning programmes at levels from Pre-Entry up to and including Level 2. These programmes range from discrete to embedded courses, and from classroom and community provision to voluntary and work-based learning. Achievement and progress in *Skills for Life* are recognised through certification of Key Skills, GCSE Maths and English, and adult literacy and numeracy. It is therefore crucial that the strategy supports and reflects the successful implementation of all other post-16 strategies. These strategies include *Success for All*, the strategy for reforming post-16 further education, and the Skills Strategy, which aims to ensure that the skills we develop are valuable to young people and valued by employers. Our goal to improve the skills of young people is also central to the *Opportunity and Excellence 14–19* strategy and the *14–19 Education and Skills White Paper.*

Each organisation and individual has a contribution to make. We believe that the most important element for successful delivery of *Skills for Life* is partnership, together with the ownership of the strategy by all our key supporting and development partners.

Government departments, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), Jobcentre Plus, the Prison and Probation Services, development and learning providers in the post-16 learning sector,

businesses, the CBI, the TUC, Sector Skills Councils and many other organisations are working together to improve the literacy, language and numeracy skills of adults through:

- **boosting demand** for learning through a high-profile promotional campaign and by engaging all partners across Government and employers in identifying and addressing the literacy and numeracy needs of their learners and employees

- **ensuring capacity** of provision by securing sufficient funding and co-ordinating planning and delivery to meet learners' needs

- **improving the standards** of teaching and learning in literacy, numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision

- **raising learner achievement** through the new national learning, teaching and assessment infrastructure and reducing barriers to learning.

A robust, consistent and varied assessment infrastructure is essential if we are to identify and engage our learners. *Good Practice Guidelines* is a useful supporting resource for those involved in assessing learners in the early stages of their 'Learning Journey'. This booklet offers guidance to help individuals and organisations raise the quality and consistency of their assessment processes.

Barry Brooks
Head of the *Skills for Life* Strategy Unit

Acknowledgements

These materials have been published on behalf of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) by BTL and AlphaPlus Consultancy Ltd. They represent one outcome of the Assessment Tools Project, which was set up by the *Skills for Life* Strategy Unit at the DfES to develop support materials for the different types of assessment that form part of the Learning Journey undertaken by *Skills for Life* learners. For further information on the Assessment Tool Project, see pages 48 to 49, where there are details of other assessment tools being developed.

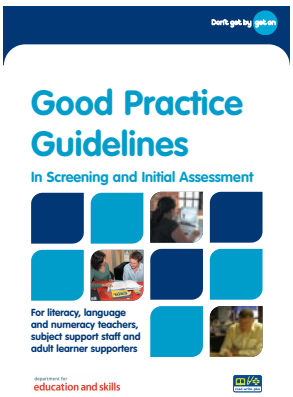
We would like to thank the following organisations: Bexley Training Group, Birmingham Adult Education Service, Cornwall Family Learning, Doncaster College, the Dukeries College, Havant College, Hull Adult Education, HMP Winchester, Jobcentre Plus (North Nottinghamshire), Learndirect (Bedford College), North Nottinghamshire College, Park Lane College, Peterborough Regional College, Positive People Development, Walsall College of Arts and Technology, Waltham Forest College and Worcester College of Technology.

Extracts from this document may be reproduced for non-commercial education or training purposes on condition that the source is acknowledged.

© Crown Copyright 2005
Produced by the Department for Education and Skills

Contents

	Page
About this Guide	1
Introduction	1
Section 1: The Learning Journey	4
Section 2: Signposting and Referral	5
Section 3: Screening	8
Section 4: Initial Assessment	12
4.1 The initial interview	16
4.2 Providing information	18
4.3 The initial assesment tool	19
Section 5: Diagnostic Assessment and the ILP	21
Section 6: Legal Requirements	24
Section 7: Quality Assurance	26
Appendix 1: The Learning Journey	29
Appendix 2: Teaching Qualifications Framework	31
Appendix 3: Flowcharts	33
Appendix 4: The Learning Journey in Practice – Case Studies	37
Appendix 5: Assessment Tools	48
Appendix 6: Notes on Questions Used in Initial Interviews	50



About this Guide

The *Skills for Life* Strategy Unit has developed the concept of a structured 'Learning Journey', to describe an adult learner's progress from her/his first contact with an institution to the completion of a learning programme. This guide describes the initial steps in this journey. The materials are based on current best practice and seek to demystify the process involved in screening and initial assessment, and suggest ways in which they can be managed in order to best meet the needs of potential adult learners and young people. The way in which learners are dealt with at their first points of contact during screening and initial assessment is crucial. Unless these processes are handled with care and sensitivity, potential learners can easily become demoralised and give up at these first two hurdles.

Introduction

What are these guidelines for?

These guidelines have been designed to assist all individuals involved in:

- screening would-be adult learners in order to establish a literacy, language or numeracy learning need
- carrying out an initial assessment of adult learners' skills.

The guidelines represent examples of current best practice and will help to ensure consistency across different organisations and amongst those involved in screening and/or initial assessment.

Who are these guidelines for?

This guide has been designed for all adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL staff involved in screening and initial assessment, including:

- teachers, tutors and trainers
- subject support staff and adult learner support staff
- frontline workers in, for example, Jobcentre Plus, voluntary and community organisations and the Probation and Prison Services
- union learning representatives.

Such individuals may work in a variety of contexts, including:

- colleges and training centres
- industry and business
- the armed forces
- probation and prison services
- community and referral organisations
- family work.

The range of personnel involved in screening and initial assessment, and the contexts in which they work, continues to increase. For that reason, it has not proved possible in this guide to cover all personnel and contexts in the above lists. These guidelines have, however, been designed to be flexible enough to be used by all personnel involved with adult learners and young people at the start of their learning journey, in whatever context they may be working.

What happens to learners between the point where they first make contact with a learning organisation and the point where they start a learning programme?

A survey of a range of organisations – such as colleges of varying sizes, community-based and outreach centres, Adult Education Centres and a drop-in centre – shows that there is no simple answer to this question. Much depends on the size of the organisation, its location within the community, the way in which contact with future learners is made, and also its link with other organisations.

For example, there are variations in the use of screening tools and in the time allowed for the initial assessment process. In addition, the way in which this process fits within an organisation's procedures for enrolling new learners will vary from one organisation to another.

Despite these variations, there are many similarities in the way in which screening and initial assessments are carried out. These guidelines draw on these similarities and outline the areas of good practice revealed by the survey.

The structure of the guidelines is based on the stages of the learning journey defined by the *Skills for Life* Strategy Unit and outlined in the next section. The learning journey can be found in **Appendix 1** (pages 29 to 30).

What is the *Skills for Life* Teaching Qualifications Framework?

The *Skills for Life* Teaching Qualifications Framework is the specialist qualifications framework introduced to support the ongoing programme of training and professionalisation of the *Skills for Life* workforce. It is important that all assessment in the different stages of the learning journey are carried out by an appropriately trained practitioner. Further information about the Teaching Qualifications Framework can be found in Appendix 2 (pages 31 to 32).

Delivering Skills for Life
The national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills

The Learning Journey

Don't get by get on

Formative Assessment
takes place regularly to review progress against the learning plan

Summative Assessment
takes place at the end of each learning episode, giving feedback on learning achievements; may be a qualification, test or a completed ILP

Learning Materials
referenced to the curriculum and linked to a context that is meaningful and motivational for the learner

LEARNING PROGRAMME

Signposting/Referral
indicates an aspiration

Screening
indicates a general need

Initial Assessment
identifies a learner's level, allowing selection of the right learning programme

Diagnostic Assessment
leads to a detailed personal profile, providing the basis for an individual learning plan (ILP)

Individual Learning Plan
based on Diagnostic Assessment and the curriculum

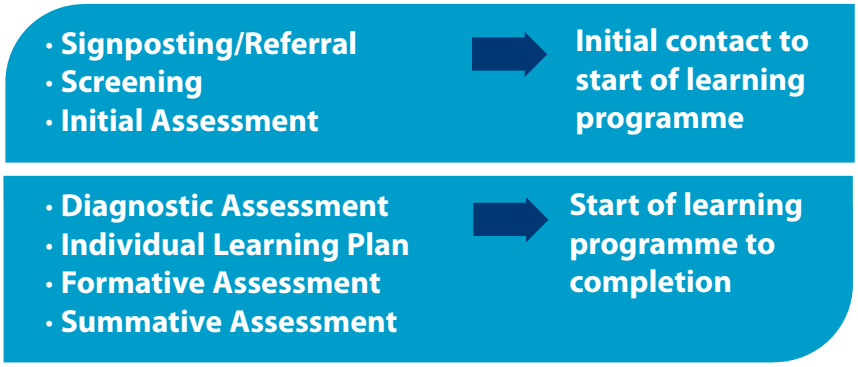
1 The Learning Journey

What is the learning journey?

The learning journey is a concept developed by the *Skills for Life* Strategy Unit to describe a learner's progress from first contact with an institution to the completion of a learning programme.

What are the stages in the learning journey?

The learner's journey comprises seven stages. They are:



Appendix 1 (pages 29 to 30) contains a flowchart of all seven stages of the learning journey, together with a definition of what is involved at each stage.

Appendix 3 (pp33–36) contains flowcharts summarising these three stages.

These guidelines are mainly concerned with the first three stages in the learning journey (signposting/referral, screening and initial assessment), although some reference will be made to diagnostic assessment and the Individual Learning Plan.

How does this work in practice?

As noted in the introduction, there is considerable variation in the way organisations carry out the initial stages in the learning journey.

Individual organisations decide, according to their contexts and procedures, whether, for example, to:

- carry out the initial stages as discrete activities
- merge some of the stages
- embed some of the stages in an induction programme
- carry out the diagnostic assessment before or after allocating a learner to a programme.

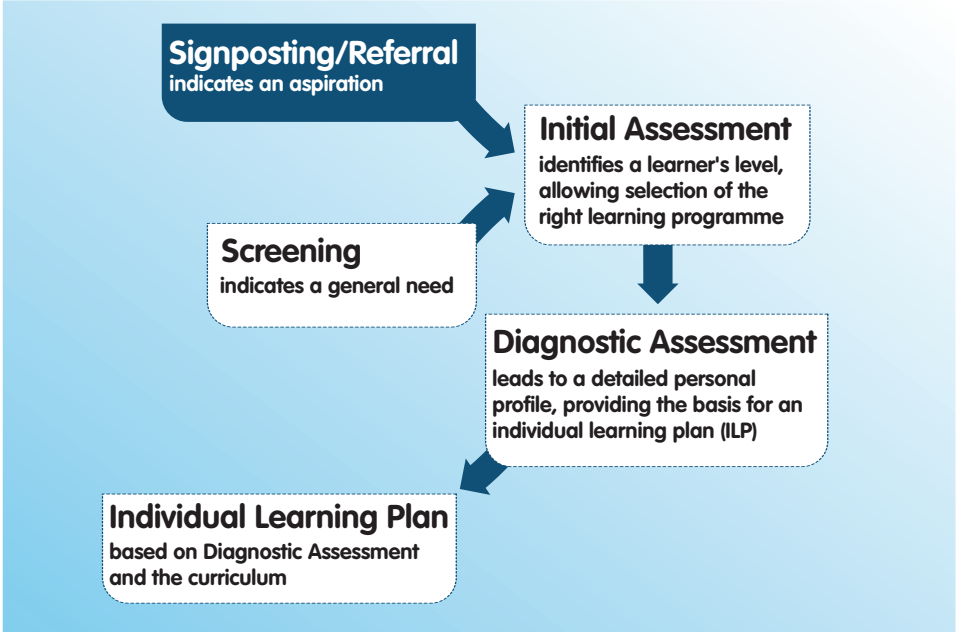
A number of case studies illustrating this diversity are provided in **Appendix 4** (pages 37 to 47).

2 Signposting and Referral

Individuals are signposted when they are given information on where to access further information, advice or guidance, or learning provision. Individuals act on their own behalf in following this up.

Individuals are referred when they are transferred to any more in-depth information, advice, guidance, related service or learning provision. This process is mediated through an adviser making an appointment for the learner or giving the learner's details to a provider. This procedure always requires the learner's permission. The adviser will then contact the agency to ensure the referral has taken place.

See Appendix 1 (pp29–30).



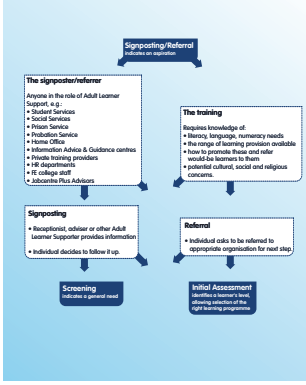
Who is involved?

An increasingly wide range of people are involved in signposting and referral, including frontline staff in: colleges and private training providers; Student Services; Jobcentre Plus; Connexions; Information, Advice and Guidance; Social Services; children's centres; housing associations; the Home Office; HR departments. Receptionists and volunteers in a variety of other contexts, such as doctors' clinics and libraries, may also be involved.

What training is needed?

There are no formal *Skills for Life* training requirements for signposting and referral. However, for those joining the teaching profession, and for all frontline staff who wish to support learners as they embark on their learning journey, the first unit of the new Level 2 Adult Learner Support

See Appendix 3 (p35) for a flowchart summarising this stage.



Qualification provides ideal training in *Skills for Life* awareness and signposting. Information about this qualification is provided in **Appendix 2** (pages 31 to 32). **Appendix 1** (pages 29 to 30) indicates the training requirements for the signposter/referrer in relation to the Learning Journey.

The knowledge and understanding required for this role include:

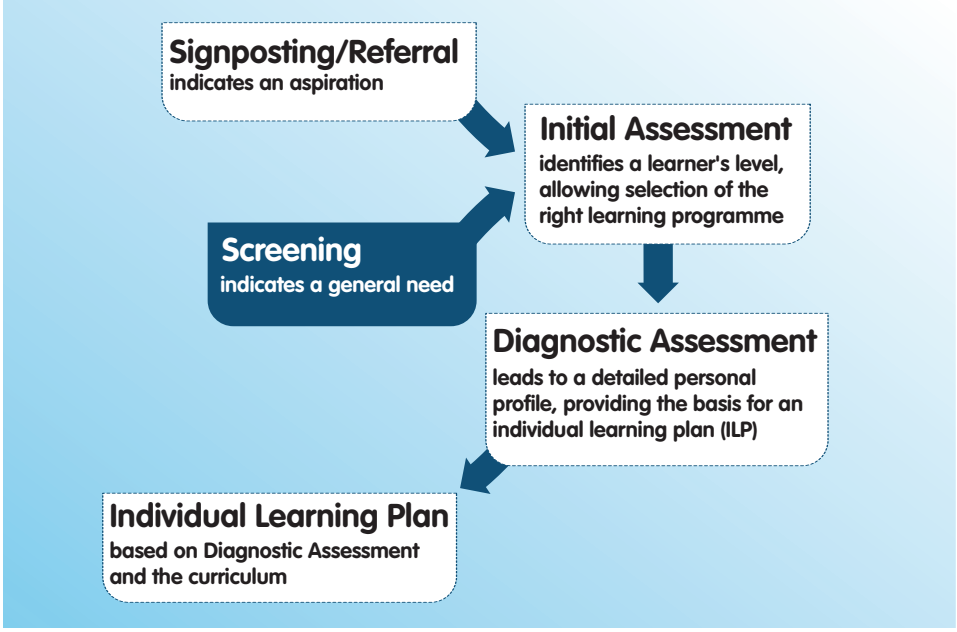
- adult, literacy and numeracy needs in the local community
- the range of opportunities available for literacy, numeracy and ESOL development within the local area
- ways of promoting learning opportunities and referring potential learners to them
- key cultural, social and religious concerns as they apply to adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL education generally and the local area specifically.

3 Screening

Screening assesses whether an individual has a literacy, language or numeracy need. It should be used to identify potential learners who would benefit from more in-depth assessment. Usually screening takes around 10 minutes.

Screening should be pitched at Level 2 of the adult literacy and/or numeracy core curriculum. An adult who does not meet the standards at that level should be referred for further assessment.

See Appendix 1 (pp29–30).

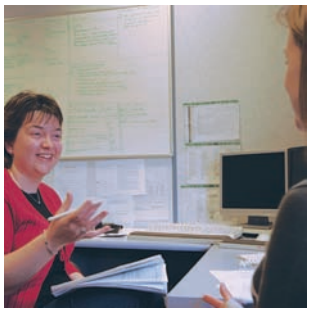


Is screening always needed?

It is a matter for individual organisations to decide whether screening is always needed. The case studies in **Appendix 4** (pages 37 to 47) provide examples of individual organisations' approach to the use of screening.

In addition to colleges and agencies, such as *learndirect*, the following organisations may use screening assessments:

- Jobcentre Plus
- Probation Service
- community outreach programmes
- Connexions
- the Youth Service
- voluntary organisations
- housing, health and community regeneration programmes
- Youth Offending Teams
- Prison Service.



Such organisations then refer adults to other forms of provision as appropriate. In order to ensure that this is an effective process and that an adult's needs are met fully, it is important that strong links are forged with other support providers and those involved in the next stage of the learning journey.

Who is involved?

- Frontline workers in any agencies including those listed on the previous page
- Frontline staff in college Admissions Departments
- Student Services
- Informaton, Advice and Guidance Services
- Anyone in the role of Adult Learner Support, e.g:
  - Teaching assistants
  - Advisors and development workers
  - Volunteers and mentors

What training is needed?

Screening is a task which must be handled with care and sensitivity. It is therefore important that it is carried out by a practitioner trained in the use of the screening tool. The first unit of the Level 2 Adult Learner Support Qualification is designed to develop the skills needed to:

- use screening tools to identify literacy, language and numeracy needs
- provide effective feedback following screening.

Information about this qualification is provided in **Appendix 2** (pages 31 to 32).

What does screening involve?

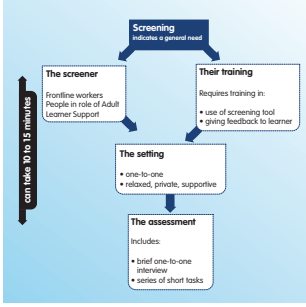
Screening often involves a brief informal 1:1 interview to put learners at their ease, followed by a short series of tasks to establish literacy, language or numeracy needs.

A number of assessment tools have been produced as part of the Assessment Tools Project. Please see **Appendix 5** (pages 48 to 49) for a list of these tools, including those used for screening.

How long does screening take?

How long screening takes will depend on the screening tool used – but

the process normally takes up to 10 or 15 minutes.



See Appendix 3 (p35) for a flowchart summarising this stage.

How does the screener set the scene for screening?

The screener needs to be able to:

- create the right environment – learners are more likely to respond positively if the situation is:
  - non-threatening
  - private and confidential
  - relaxed
  - encouraging
  - supportive

- choose a suitable point in the conversation to introduce the assessment, watching out for signs of nervousness and unease

- explain that the results of the assessment will be discussed fully with the learner

- support the learner's self-confidence by moving on to another tool, or drawing the session to a close, if the learner cannot complete the assessment

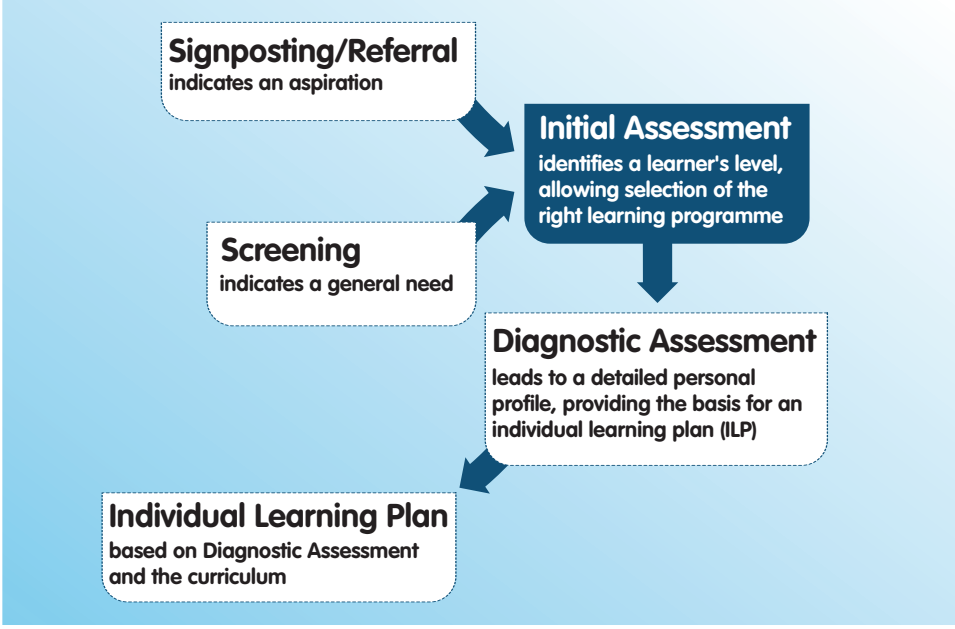
- explain that there will be examples to try first to make sure that the learner knows what to expect.

Literacy Test
ACCIDENTS AT WORK: BURNS
Next

4 Initial Assessment

Initial Assessment identifies a learner's skills against a level or levels within the national standards. It should be used to help place learners in appropriate learning programmes at an appropriate level. It is usually followed by detailed diagnostic assessment. Learners may have different levels of reading, writing, numeracy and language skills. The process may take around 30 minutes.

See Appendix 1 (pp29–30)



Who is involved?

- Literacy, numeracy and ESOL specialist teachers
- Subject support staff

What training is needed?

Initial assessment should be conducted by individuals trained to administer the initial assessment tool. The interpretation of the assessment results should be overseen by an experienced *Skills for Life* practitioner.

The induction of new staff into the organisation's initial assessment process can include interview training, work-shadowing and observation of experienced teachers.

Appendix 2 (pages 31 to 32) provides sources of information on the *Skills for Life* Teaching Qualifications Framework. **Appendix 1** (pages 29 to 30) indicates the training requirements for the assessor in relation to the learning journey.

Where does an initial assessment take place?

An initial assessment may take place within the organisation that screened the learner or in a different organisation, to which the learner has been referred. In many organisations screening and initial assessment are treated as a continuous process. An initial assessment will require:

- a quiet place to learn, where the learner can complete the tasks without being disturbed
- access to a computer if an onscreen tool is being used
- support on hand to answer any queries the learner may have
- an appropriately qualified person to give feedback to the learner.

What does initial assessment include?

As the case studies in **Appendix 4** (pages 37 to 47) illustrate, organisations will conduct the initial assessment in a manner appropriate to their context and procedures.

In general terms, initial assessment is a process which has three elements:

The initial interview (Section 4.1)
An opportunity to gather some background information from the learner

Providing information (Section 4.2)
An opportunity for learners to gain information about the range of possible programmes

The initial assessment tool (Section 4.3)
The administration of the relevant initial assessment tool

The order in which these elements are addressed is not fixed and will depend on the nature of the learner's literacy, language or numeracy abilities and their level of confidence.

How long does the initial assessment process take?

How long the initial assessment takes will depend to a large extent on the context of the organisation conducting the process and on the initial assessment tool used.

An initial assessment will normally take about 30 minutes to complete but may take longer for some individuals, depending on the tool or context. The assessor will be trying to get a general indication of the learner's background, skills, confidence and goals, and also to ensure that the learner is sufficiently comfortable with the situation to be able to engage with the assessment tool with confidence.

The initial assessment is often conducted on a 1:1 basis. Some organisations dealing with large numbers of learners may carry out the initial assessment process as part of an induction programme (see Appendix 4 Case Study 3, page 40).

How does the assessor set the scene for the initial assessment?

It is important to remember that for many learners this will be their first encounter for many years with a learning organisation.

Some ESOL learners may have very little previous educational experience; others may have been highly educated, in their own language. For the majority, this is likely to be their first encounter with the British education system.

Literacy and numeracy learners may be very nervous and lack confidence: this may affect their ability to respond to the questions.

ESOL learners may also be very nervous, and their ability to respond to the questions is also likely to be affected by their level of language ability.

It is, therefore, important to put learners at their ease from the beginning by creating a non-threatening, relaxed and supportive environment.

The experience and skill of the assessor are central to:

- establishing a picture of the learner's background, skills, confidence and goals
- ensuring that the learners do as well as possible in the assessment.

The experienced assessor will adjust the order of the questions and their position in the overall process to suit the emerging characteristics of the learner. So, if, for example, an ESOL learner says they have difficulties in writing but like reading, it may be appropriate to give them a reading test at this point to show what they can do and boost their confidence.

The experienced assessor will also be able to use follow-up questions which will encourage the learners to open up, speak more freely and be more forthcoming.

The sequence of events will depend on the learner's responses, and the experienced assessor will select the most appropriate sequence to make the learner feel comfortable and build their confidence.

4.1 The initial interview

What is the purpose of the initial interview?

The initial interview is designed to:

- put learners at ease by asking some general questions about their previous learning experiences and future plans
- give learners a chance to ask some questions
- provide assessors with sufficient information to enable them to select initial assessment tasks appropriate to the learner's level.

What skills and knowledge does an assessor need?

Successful interviewing is a very skilful activity. The skills needed will be developed through interview training, experience and practice. For example, assessors need to be able to:

- put learners at their ease
- listen sensitively
- read body language
- know when to prompt, and when to wait for a response
- phrase and order questions to respond to the learner
- build confidence
- discuss goals
- be sensitive to cultural and religious concerns.

National standards and all core curricula can be found on the DfES website: www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/Publications

They also need to:

- know what learning opportunities are available
- consider progression issues
- know the literacy and numeracy national standards.

What are literacy and numeracy assessors looking for in the interview?

Literacy and numeracy assessors are informally assessing learners':

- reading, writing, speaking and listening, and numeracy skills
- levels of confidence
- attitudes to learning and potential learning styles.

This informal assessment will:

- contribute to the assessor's decision about the level of course to allocate following the initial assessment

- give the assessor an indication of which parts of the initial assessment learners will be able to complete, and enable the assessor to prepare alternative activities, if necessary, so that learners are not discouraged.

What are ESOL assessors looking for in the interview?

ESOL assessors are using the interview to assess speaking and listening skills. They have the relevant core curriculum criteria to hand when doing this. The initial interview enables assessors to select the most appropriate level of speaking, listening, reading and writing tasks for the initial assessment itself.

Reading and writing skills for ESOL learners

The reading and writing skills of ESOL learners are measured against the national standards for literacy. It can therefore be appropriate to use suitable literacy assessment tools to measure these skills.

How long does the initial interview take?

Questions from the initial interview need not be asked in one go but may be seeded through the whole initial assessment process. Generally, however, it is suggested that gathering background information about the learner takes some 10 to 15 minutes.

What questions are included in the initial interview?

Most organisations have a list of questions on which to base the interview. The questions often appear on, for example, an initial interview form or an admissions form. The majority include the following question areas:

- the reasons for coming to the centre/course
- previous learning programmes
- previous qualifications
- previous/current employment
- aspirations and ambitions
- literacy, language or numeracy difficulties or gaps.

A commentary on some of the issues which can be raised by these question areas is provided in **Appendix 6** (pages 50 to 51).

4.2 Providing information

What do learners want to know?

At an appropriate point during the interview, or after the initial assessment exercise, the assessor will provide information about the range of literacy, language and numeracy programmes available, as well as other courses run elsewhere in the organisation which might interest the learner. They will also ensure that the learner has an opportunity to ask questions.

What an individual wants to know will vary from learner to learner and will depend on how much information the learner can absorb at this stage and what information they may have already gathered. Each assessor must, accordingly, judge the level of information the learner can cope with on these issues. Having said that, here is a list of things learners commonly want to know:

- As a minimum, learners will want to know about the literacy, language and numeracy course they are offered, what to expect, how it will be assessed, and what they may get out of it
- Further information about the national standards and national qualifications
- Many higher-level literacy and numeracy and ESOL learners will be comfortable with the information they are given but will be concerned to know that the qualification they will get is regognised nationally. In order to provide encouragement and reassurance, it is a good idea for the assessor to give examples of the sort of questions that might be asked in, say, a national test.
- Other, possibly lower-level learners, may be intimidated by the jargon or just not interested at this point
- Learners may also want to know about courses run elsewhere in the organisation. These may include programmes in which skills development activities are embedded (for example, vocational courses).

4.3 The initial assessment tool

What is the purpose of initial assessment tools?

Initial assessment tools allow you to determine, as accurately as possible, the learner's skills against a level or levels within the national standards. They help the assessor to allocate the learner to an appropriate learning programme at an appropriate level.

The tools seek to assess as broad a range of skills as possible in literacy, numeracy and language, since learners may have different levels of reading, writing, speaking and listening, and numeracy skills.

- **A literacy initial assessment tool**
  This will primarily assess aspects of reading and writing skills. In the future, computer technology may be capable of assessing speaking and listening skills as well

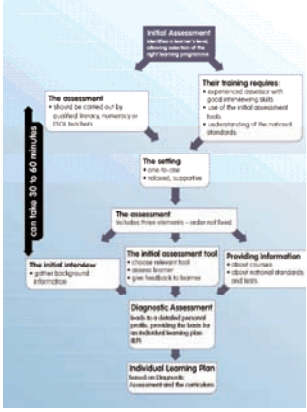
- **A numeracy initial assessment tool**
  This is likely to cover number, measuring shape and space, and handling data

- **An ESOL initial assessment tool**
  This will cover speaking and listening skills, and it may also cover reading and writing skills.

However, it is the combination of the information gathered from the interview and the results of the initial assessment that enables assessors to make a judgement about the level of achievement in a given skill and helps them to place the learner in an appropriate learning programme at an appropriate level.

The initial assessment is concerned with identifying an approximate skill level. A diagnostic assessment tool(s) will be used later to provide a more detailed profile of the learner's strengths, weaknesses and skills. This Diagnostic Assessment is used to develop an Individual Learning Plan (ILP), which will establish specific learning targets for each individual learner.

Initial assessment tools are a relatively new addition to the assessor's toolkit. Currently, the majority of tools are paper-based, although new computer-based instruments are now becoming available. Please see **Appendix 5** (pages 48 to 49) for a list of assessment tools produced as part of the Assessment Tools Project, including those for initial assessment.



See Appendix 3 (p36) for a flowchart summarising this stage.

Should the learner be given feedback on the initial assessment?

It is important to provide the learner with some feedback on the results of the initial assessment as soon as possible after the assessment has taken place. Learners often underestimate their skills, and positive feedback can enhance their self-confidence.

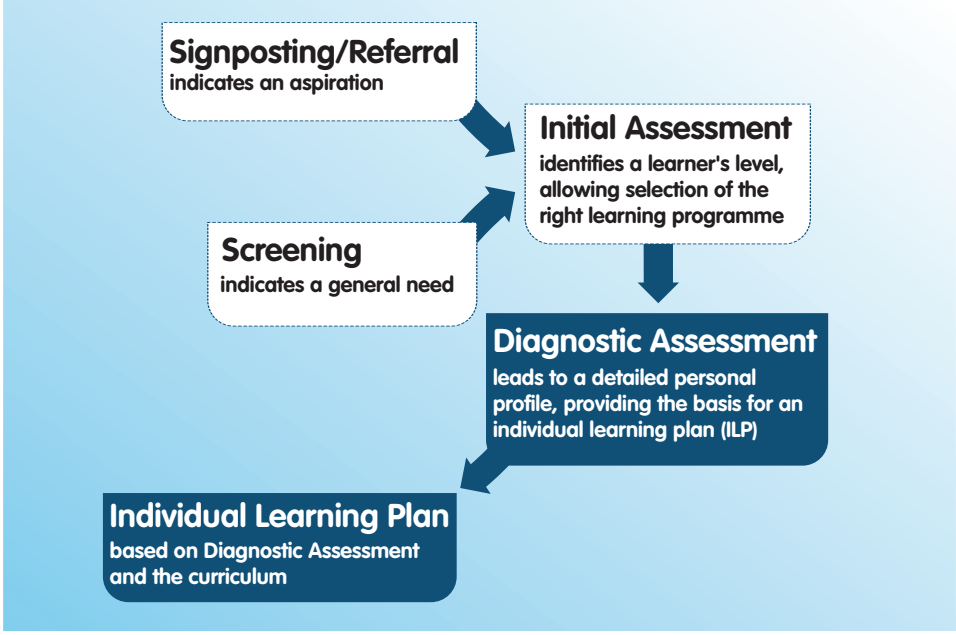
Should records of the information from the initial assessment process be kept?

It is important that records are kept of the information gathered during the interview and of the results of the initial assessment. The information recorded should be discussed and agreed with the learner.

The information provides an important starting point for course providers and will form part of the learner's ILP.

The learner should also be made aware that the assessor may, where relevant, pass the information to other personnel (e.g. Jobcentre Plus advisors, probation officers) but that this may happen only with their permission.

5 Diagnostic Assessment and the ILP



See Appendix 1 (pp29–30).

What happens when the initial assessment process is completed?

Following the initial assessment, learners will be offered a learning programme. They may start this programme immediately, or there may be a gap, depending on the availability of courses and the structure of the organisation.

When the learner joins the programme the teacher will:

- carry out the diagnostic assessment
- agree an ILP with the learner.

What is the definition of diagnostic assessment?

Diagnostic assessment identifies a learner's strengths and weaknesses and highlights skills gaps. It helps provide a detailed learner profile against the standards and curriculum documents and should also be used to inform and structure learners' ILPs to use as a basis for their programme of study. This process takes several hours and should be carried out over a period of time as part of a learner's learning programme.

How is the ILP linked to initial and diagnostic assessment?

The ILP is an output of the initial and diagnostic assessments. It sets out what a learner plans to learn, by when, the ways in which they will undertake the learning and the resources required to bring the plan into action.

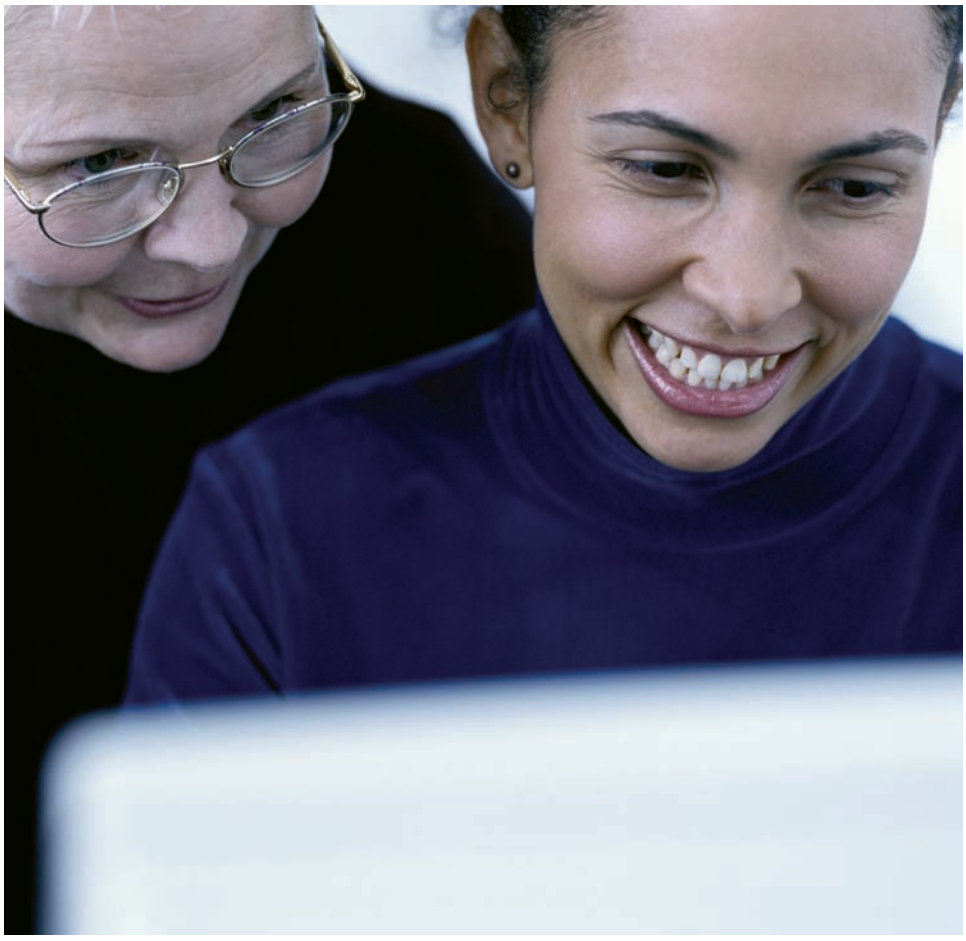
ILPs are compiled, reviewed and developed by the specialist teacher in consultation with the learner.

How is the ILP developed?

Some organisations will develop an outline ILP based on the information gathered during the three elements of the initial assessment process. The information will be discussed and agreed with the learner and passed to the course teacher.

Following the diagnostic assessment, the teacher and learner together will agree on the individual's learning targets linked to the curriculum.

These individual targets are shaped from the information gathered about goals at interview, modified by the results of initial assessment, steered by the way they relate to the national standards and core curriculum, and informed by the diagnostic assessment and the learner's profile, before being written into the ILP.



6 Legal Requirements

It is important that organisations carrying out screening and initial assessments are fully aware of their legal obligations and, in particular, of the law as it stands with regard to the following:

Legislation associated with equality of opportunity

- The Sex Discrimination Act, 1975
- The Race Relations Act, 1976
- The Race Relations (Amendment) Act, 2000
- The Disability Discrimination Act, 1995 as amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act, 2001
- The Human Rights Act, 1998.

Legislation associated with collecting, processing, storing and using information

- The Data Protection Act, 1998
- The Freedom of Information Act, 2000.

If you are involved in screening or carrying out initial assessments with adults, check with your line manager(s) that the organisation complies with this legislation. You should also be aware of your own responsibilities.

7 Quality Assurance

It is important that screening and initial assessment activities are monitored from time to time in order to ensure that processes and procedures are working effectively and consistently, and that learners are receiving the best possible advice and support. A sound quality assurance system will involve establishing clear objectives and action plans, regular observations and verification, and a preparedness to change things if or when they are not working well. Monitoring should include:

- observing staff carrying out screening activities
- observing learners undertaking initial assessments
- collecting feedback from learners and assessors.

Once collected, this information will need to be collated and reported. Where necessary, changes should be made in the light of findings, and additional training in screening and assessment offered/provided.

Appendices

		Page
Appendix 1:	The Learning Journey	**29**
Appendix 2:	Teaching Qualifications Framework	**31**
Appendix 3:	Flowcharts	**33**
Appendix 4:	The Learning Journey in Practice – Case Studies	**37**
Appendix 5:	Project Tools	**48**
Appendix 6:	Notes on Questions Used in Initial Interviews	**50**

Delivering Skills for Life
The national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills

The Learning Journey

Don't get by get on

Formative Assessment
takes place regularly to review progress against the learning plan

Summative Assessment
takes place at the end of each learning episode, giving feedback on learning achievements; may be a qualification, test or a completed ILP

Learning Materials
referenced to the curriculum and linked to a context that is meaningful and motivational for the learner

LEARNING PROGRAMME

Signposting/Referral
indicates an aspiration

Screening
indicates a general need

Initial Assessment
identifies a learner's level, allowing selection of the right learning programme

Diagnostic Assessment
leads to a detailed personal profile, providing the basis for an individual learning plan (ILP)

Individual Learning Plan
based on Diagnostic Assessment and the curriculum

The Learning Journey

Don't get by get on

The various stages of the learning journey are defined in many different ways. The Department for Education and Skills uses these definitions:

1. Signposting/Referral
Individuals are *signposted* when they are given information on where they can find further information, advice, guidance or learning provision. The individuals act on their own behalf to follow this information up.

Individuals are *referred* when they are transferred to a source of more in-depth information, advice, guidance, related services or learning provision. This process is mediated by the adviser, who makes an appointment for the client or gives the client's details to a provider. Referral always requires the client's permission. The adviser then contacts the agency to ensure that the referral has taken place.

The first unit of the Level 2 Adult Learner Support Qualification provides ideal training in Skills for Life awareness and signposting.

2. Screening
Screening is the process of assessing whether an individual has a literacy, language or numeracy need. It should be used to identify learners who might benefit from more in-depth assessment. Screening usually takes around 10 minutes.

Screening must be administered by a practitioner trained in the use of the screening tool. The Level 2 Adult Learner Support Qualification equips candidates with these skills.

3. Initial Assessment
Initial assessment identifies a learner's skills against a level or levels within the national standards. It should be used to help place learners in appropriate learning programmes at an appropriate level. It is usually followed by detailed diagnostic assessment. Learners may have different levels of reading, writing, numeracy and language skills. The process may take around 30 minutes.

Initial assessment should be conducted by individuals trained to administer the initial assessment tool. The interpretation of the assessment results should be overseen by an experienced *Skills for Life* practitioner.

4. Diagnostic Assessment*
Diagnostic assessment identifies a learner's strengths and weaknesses and highlights any skills gaps. It helps provide a detailed learner profile against the standards and curriculum documents and should also be used to inform and structure a learner's individual learning plan (see point 5) to use as a basis for a programme of study. This process takes several hours and should be carried out as part of a learner's learning programme.

5. Individual Learning Plan (ILP)
An individual learning plan is an outcome of Initial and Diagnostic assessment. It sets out the learner's plan to learn, a timetable for learning, ways of learning and resources required.

ILPs are compiled, reviewed and developed by the specialist teacher in consultation with the learner.

6. Formative Assessment*
Formative assessment helps both learner and teacher to review progress and is a central part of the learning process. It will take place during a learning programme on a regular basis. It helps learners and their teachers to identify progress in relation to the learning plan. Progress should be recorded and new learning goals identified.

7. Summative Assessment*
Summative assessment provides evidence of what a learner has achieved at the end of each learning episode. It provides feedback to a learner and teacher on achievements in relation to the standards and curriculum documents. Summative assessment may take the form of a record of achievement, a unit of qualification, a whole qualification or a test.

*** Ongoing Diagnostic, Formative and Summative assessments should be carried out by a Literacy/Numeracy/ESOL specialist teacher.**

A2 Appendix 2: Teaching Qualifications Framework

The *Skills for Life* Teaching Qualifications Framework sets out the training requirements and associated qualifications needed by practitioners administering the assessments in the first three stages in the learning journey described in this guide. Information about the Teaching Qualifications Framework can be found in the documents listed below and opposite.

Title	Summary of content	To obtain a copy
The *Skills for Life* Teaching Qualifications Framework: A User's Guide Ref: SFLTQG	An overview of the Qualifications Framework, including: • the introduction of the new subject specifications • the training requirements for new and existing literacy, numeracy and ESOL teachers and support staff • the timescales for the introduction of the new qualifications at Levels 2, 3 and 4.	Download a copy from: www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/qualityandtraining Order a copy from: DfES Publications, quoting full title and reference number: Tel: 0845 6022260 Email: dfes@prolog.uk.com
New Specialist *Skills for Life* Teachers Ref:ROUTEMAP-NT **Existing *Skills for Life* Teachers** Ref: ROUTEMAP-ET **Teachers of Other Subjects and Those in a Learning Support Role** Ref: ROUTEMAP-SL	The *Skills for Life* Strategy Unit has produced these compact guidance booklets or 'routemaps'. Each booklet draws on the information in *The Skills for Life Teaching Qualifications Framework: A User's Guide*. This provides practical information for new and existing literacy, numeracy and ESOL teachers and support staff.	Order a copy from: DfES Publications, quoting full title and reference number: Tel: 0845 6022260 Email: dfes@prolog.uk.com

Title	Summary of content	To obtain a copy
Subject Specifications for Teachers of Adult Literacy and Numeracy Ref: SS01/2002 **Subject Specifications for Teachers of ESOL** Ref: ESOL/SS01/2002	These subject specifications, produced by the DfES and FENTO (now Lifelong Learning UK), define the knowledge, understanding and personal skills required of teachers and those who support the teaching and learning of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL. They are used to inform the development of the qualifications in the *Skills for Life* Teaching Qualifications Framework.	Download a copy from: www.lifelonglearninguk.org Order a copy from: DfES Publications, quoting full title and reference number Tel: 0845 60 22 260 Email: dfes@prolog.uk.com
FENTO Standards for Teaching and Supporting Learning	Since September 2001, all new teachers in further education are required to work towards an initial teaching qualification appropriate to their role, based on the FENTO Standards for Teaching and Supporting Learning, and are required to gain a full initial teaching qualification.	Download a copy from: www.lifelonglearninguk.org

Lifelong Learning UK also provides a helpline (tel: 020 7332 9535) offering guidance and advice for those who are seeking to enter, or who are currently working in, the further education sector.

Readers are recommended to visit the websites listed in this appendix regularly to check for information updates.

A3 Appendix 3: Flowcharts

Flowcharts summarising the three stages of the learning journey addressed in these guidelines are provided on the following pages:

		Page
Flowchart 1:	Signposting and Referral	34
Flowchart 2:	Screening	35
Flowchart 3:	Initial Assessment	36

Appendix 3: Flowchart 1

Signposting/Referral
indicates an aspiration

The signposter/referrer

Anyone in the role of Adult Learner Support, e.g.:
- Student Services
- Social Services
- Prison Service
- Probation Service
- Home Office
- Information Advice & Guidance centres
- Private training providers
- HR departments
- FE college staff
- Jobcentre Plus Advisors

The training

Requires knowledge of:
- literacy, language, numeracy needs
- the range of learning provision available
- how to promote these and refer would-be learners to them
- potential cultural, social and religious concerns.

Signposting

- Receptionist, adviser or other Adult Learner Supporter provides information
- Individual decides to follow it up.

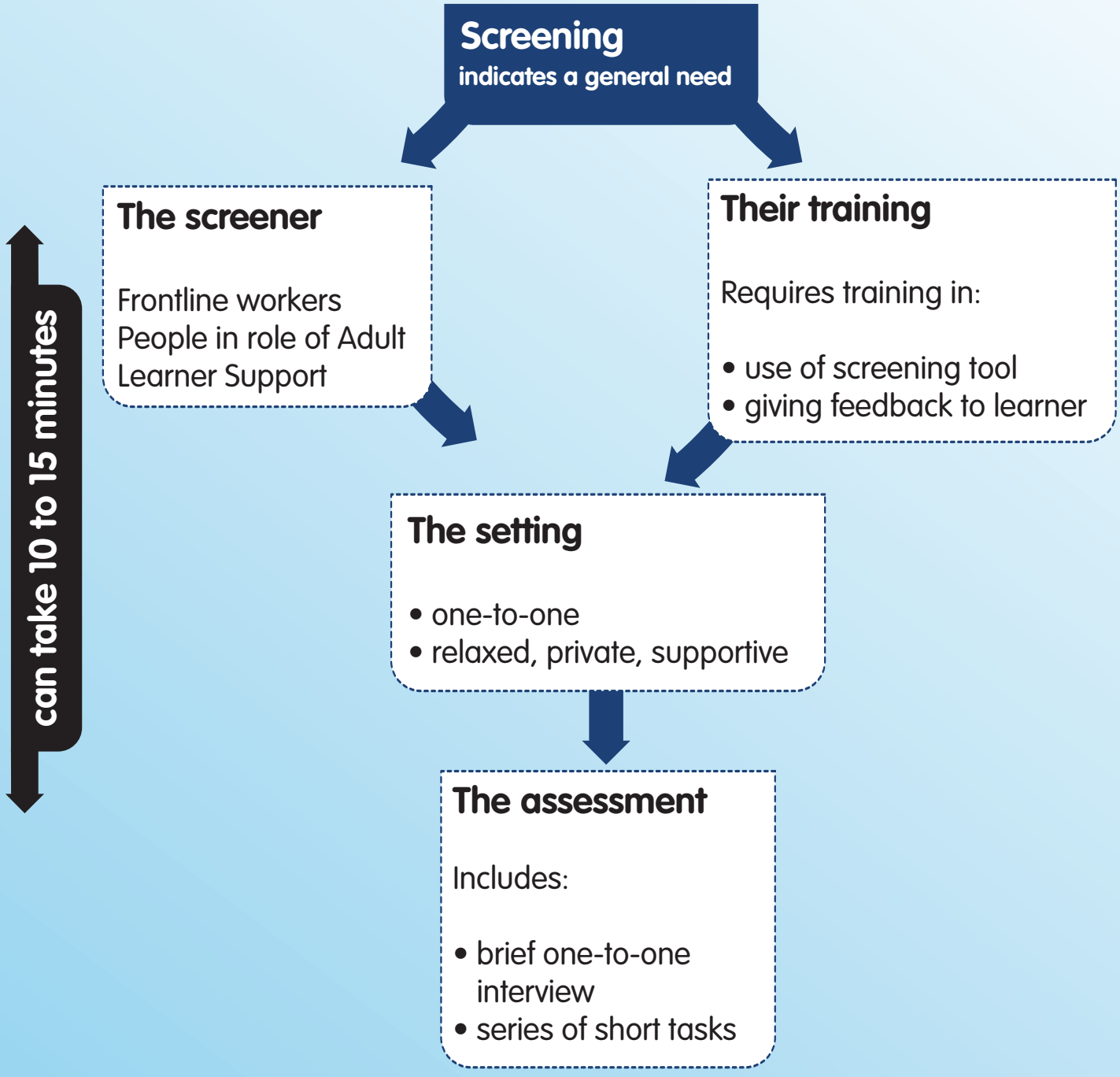
Referral

- Individual asks to be referred to appropriate organisation for next step.

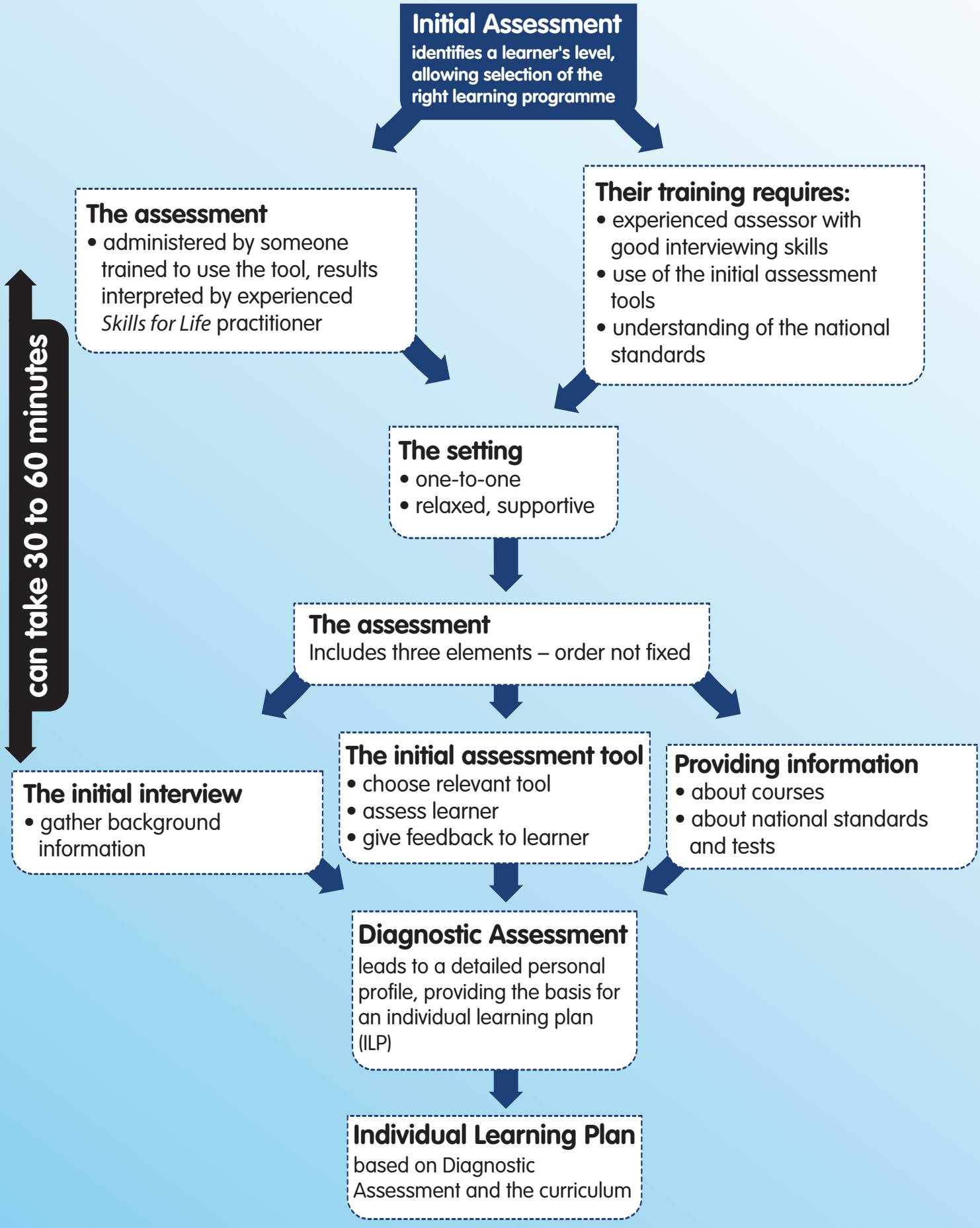
Screening
indicates a general need

Initial Assessment
identifies a learner's level, allowing selection of the right learning programme

Appendix 3: Flowchart 2



Appendix 3: Flowchart 3



A4 Appendix 4: The Learning Journey in Practice – Case Studies

This appendix contains ten case studies illustrating the different ways in which organisations carry out the initial stages of the learning journey.

		Page
Case Study 1:	A community-based centre admitting literacy, numeracy and ESOL learners	**38**
Case Study 2:	A learndirect centre	**39**
Case Study 3:	A medium-sized college admitting ESOL learners	**40**
Case Study 4:	Jobcentre Plus	**41**
Case Study 5:	A private training provider working with Jobcentre Plus	**42**
Case Study 6:	Work-based learning	**43**
Case Study 7:	Family learning	**44**
Case Study 8:	Medium-sized local community prison	**45**
Case Study 9:	Large-scale provision – An adult education service, supporting public-sector employees	**46**
Case Study 10:	A large college admitting literacy, numeracy and ESOL learners	**47**

These case studies have been collected over the course of 2004/05 and reflect practice which was current at the time of writing.

Case Study 1
A community-based centre admitting literacy, numeracy and ESOL learners

This centre is run and staffed by local college teachers. It distributes leaflets describing its adult literacy, language and numeracy courses within the community and has good local contacts (**Signposting**).

The majority of potential new learners come to the centre's offices to find out more. They are met by a receptionist who is experienced in dealing with new, and often nervous, learners. If there are no *Skills for Life*/ESOL staff available, the receptionist will take the learner's details and, if the individual agrees, make an appointment (**Referral**).

If, as is more normally the case, an appropriate member of staff is available, the learner is invited to talk to the teacher immediately. The teacher will ask a number of questions to gather some background information on the learner and give the learner an opportunity to ask about the various courses. During this interview, the teacher is able to establish a picture of the learner's literacy, language or numeracy needs, and so an informal **screening** assessment is carried out.

If the learner is comfortable with the conversation and confident enough, the teacher will invite the individual to take the relevant **initial assessment**. The teacher will provide feedback on the **initial assessment** straightaway and will then be able to allocate the learner to an appropriate course. The information gathered during this process will be recorded by the teacher, agreed by the learner and passed to the course teacher.

The more detailed diagnostic assessment will be carried out by the course teacher who will use the information to inform and structure the learner's **ILP** and programme of study.

Case Study 2
A learndirect centre

Information about *learndirect* is widely available through the network of learning centres, the Internet and through a range of agencies such as Jobcentre Plus, Sure Start, and the Salvation Army (**Signposting**).

Such agencies may have their own *learndirect* centre or they may refer the learner to a local centre (**Referral**).

When learners want to enroll on *learndirect* courses they talk to a teacher and receive initial advice and guidance. A majority of learners come to *learndirect* because they want to learn to use a computer and/or pursue a subject interest through the use of a computer.

The first section of the assessment is an on-screen screening tool consisting of five literacy and five numeracy questions. Depending on the results of the **screening**, the learner is directed to the **initial assessment**. The results of the **initial assessment** are then used to confirm whether the learner needs to progress to a literacy or numeracy **diagnostic assessment**, using *learndirect*'s diagnostic tools. These are referenced to the adult literacy/numeracy core curricula and the results of these assessments help the teacher and learner to choose the most appropriate courses to address the learner's skill gaps. All *learndirect* courses have details of how they map to the core curricula in teacher guides that accompany the course. There is also a database available to teachers, which matches the results of the diagnostic assessments to *learndirect* courses.

This particular *learndirect* hub is working with its centres to make *Skills for Life* **screening** and **initial assessment** the norm for potential learners. Assessing all learners and skills has helped to reduce any stigma, as all learners, whether they are enrolling on a business and management course or a web publishing course, receive the same treatment.

Case Study 3
A medium-sized college admitting ESOL learners

The college has links with the Home Office and with local agencies responsible for the dispersal and support of refugees and asylum seekers (**Signposting**). The majority of the learners are, therefore, referred by the Home Office and these local agencies, as well as housing associations and the local council (**Referral**).

Learners call, or come to the college, and sign up for three group sessions of three hours, each over three weeks. A group consists of 10 to 15 learners with two teachers.

During Session 1, a general introduction to the college, the teachers begin to form a picture of individual needs, and so a discrete **screening** assessment is not required.

During Session 2, group activities are organised so that the teachers are able to conduct 1:1 interviews and **initial assessments** with the learners, and to provide feedback.

During Session 3, enrolment forms are completed, learners are provided with information about the ESOL courses and their assessment, and are allocated to an appropriate class. The information gathered during this process will be recorded by the teacher, agreed by the learner and passed to the course teacher.

The more detailed **diagnostic assessment** will be carried out by the course teacher, who will use the information to inform and structure the learner's **ILP** and programme of study.

Case Study 4
Jobcentre Plus

Many people contacting Jobcentre Plus are unemployed. Information about Jobcentre Plus is widely available and includes reference to various incentives for undertaking literacy, numeracy and language courses (**Signposting**/**Referral**).

All staff (switchboard operators, receptionists and interviewers) are very aware of the need to identify literacy, language or numeracy difficulties that could adversely affect a customer's ability to function in 'normal adult society' or act as a barrier to employment. Comments such as 'My wife usually does the forms' usually flag up areas for concern. Customers are sometimes asked to read sections of forms or perform simple arithmetic tasks (wage calculations) as an informal method of screening. Alternatively, a formal screening tool may be used at this stage. This is compulsory if the learner has been unemployed for six months.

If a potential literacy, language or numeracy need is identified, customers are referred to a delivery partner for **initial assessment**. Those at or above Level 1 are referred back to Jobcentre Plus for placement on a vocational training programme. Those below Level 1 are referred to an appropriate Jobcentre Plus provider to undertake a **diagnostic assessment**. This assesment is used to agree a training plan aimed at improving the learner's skills in a work context.

Case Study 5
A private training provider working with Jobcentre Plus

This private training provider works closely with the local Jobcentre Plus. Following an application for benefit, Jobcentre Plus refers the learner to the training provider, supplying detailed information about what to expect (**Referral**).

On their first day learners attend a group welcome session, which includes information about current employment and training opportunities. On their second day each learner is given an individual interview and **initial assessment**. During the interview information is gathered about the learner's prior achievements in education and at work, and about the skills they need to develop to improve their employability and personal attributes. The **initial assessment** is designed to assess whether the learner has the literacy, numeracy and communication skills required for job search and employment. The results of the assessments are discussed with the learner. Short-term goals are agreed and transferred to an action plan. Learners with significant literacy and numeracy needs below Level 1 are referred back to Jobcentre Plus with details of relevant *Skills for Life* courses offered by the provider.

Case Study 6
Work-based learning

The organisation provides work-based learning for young people in a range of vocational areas, including Entry to Employment training. All learners are in employment or work placements and the organisation has close links with local employers, providing regular information about its training provision (**Signposting**). Learners are recruited locally, or from the surrounding area, following consultation with employers (**Referral**).

As part of their initial interview, all learners take an **initial assessment** in literacy and numeracy. The assessments are taken at the beginning and the results are discussed with the learner during the interview. Literacy and numeracy support needs are identified and recorded on an **ILP**.

All interviews are conducted by two trained interviewers who have extensive knowledge of frameworks across all areas of learning. The assessments are marked and the results discussed with learners at the end of the interview. Learners with low scores are referred for a second interview with a specialist to identify the support requirements. Other learners are booked onto a generic induction course.

No learner can start their apprenticeship programme without first attending the generic induction course. This provides teachers with an opportunity to assess softer skills, such as listening skills, personal skills, handwriting and personal development. Learners also complete an on-screen Target Skills **initial assessment** for literacy and numeracy. To ensure that they are comfortable with using a computer and with the presentation of the questions, learners practise answering questions before starting the test. The questions become progressively more difficult: when learners start to get answers wrong, the test automatically stops. Teachers discuss the results of all tests and other matters arising from the induction with each learner individually during a review at the end of the three days. During this one-to-one session, teachers draw up the **ILP** with the learner and decide the most appropriate level of programme, i.e. apprenticeship or advanced apprenticeship.

Commercially produced support materials are used to develop learners' skills and knowledge on specific targeted areas identified from the Target Skills initial assessment. The test is repeated after six months, enabling learners to see the progress that they have made in each aspect of literacy and numeracy and reinforcing their motivation to continue to develop their skills.

Case Study 7
Family learning

In this rural community, parents and children are recruited to family literacy, language and numeracy (FLLN) courses by the FLLN co-ordinator, working in conjunction with teachers in schools and early years settings and with the Schools' Advisory Service (**Signposting**).

All FLLN courses are introduced at a parents' meeting, which is usually arranged by the school and which all interested parents are invited to attend (**Referral**). During the meeting, a senior member of the Family Learning team gives a presentation about the content of the course, emphasising that it is intended for those who have literacy, numeracy and/or language needs, explaining that it will start with an initial assessment, and giving the reasons for this. At the close of the meeting, parents are offered the opportunity to sign up for the course. There is an element of self-selection at this stage, but it is also an opportunity for the member from the Family Learning team to gauge whether parents have a literacy, numeracy and/or language need (**Screening**).

In FLLN courses, it is always difficult to get parents to see themselves as learners – helping their children is always their prime motivation, and any assessment has to reflect this. In the first session, all learners complete a piece of free writing, usually about their children, to allow learners to think about what their children can do and the point they are at when they start the course. The writing produced at this time is the first part of the process leading to **diagnostic assessment**; at the end of the course the writing is given back to the parents so that they can see the advances their children have made and the improvements in their own written work.

In the following sessions, the teacher (a subject specialist) undertakes an **initial assessment** using an assessment tool specifically designed for FLLN programmes. The teacher also carries out an assessment of the parent's learning styles and an interview with the parent. It is the combination of these four elements – free writing, family-themed **initial assessment** tool, interview and learning styles assessment – that forms the basis of a full **diagnostic assessment** and subsequent compilation of the learner's **ILP**.

Case Study 8
Medium-sized local community prison

Bullingdon Community Prison operates jointly as a local and category B training prison for adult males. The education department plays a vital role in delivering *Skills for Life* courses for the prison population from pre-Entry to Level 2, on a roll-on, roll-off basis.

During the two-week induction process for new prisoners, an **initial assessment** is carried out to identify any learning needs that could be addressed during the prisoners' stay at Bullingdon. If assessment results reflect skills at Level 1 or below, prisoners are encouraged to attend appropriate *Skills for Life* courses in ESOL, literacy or numeracy. They are then streamed into classes according to their levels of ability.

When new learners enrol on *Skills for Life* courses, **diagnostic assessments** are carried out by the course lecturing team to identify specific areas of weaknesses. The results are discussed with the learners and **ILP**s are then negotiated. The plans focus on the learners' personal needs and goals, and are referenced to the relevant core curricula. The learners then embark on learning programmes to improve their skills as part of the process of rehabilitation before their release into the community.

Case Study 9
Large-scale provision – An adult education service, supporting public-sector employees

Following consultation between a large public-sector employer and the Adult Education Service concerning the needs of its employees, information about the service's city-wide support for *Skills for Life* is marketed sensitively to all staff, using former participants, staff and supervisors (**Signposting**).

Each learner has a 20–30-minute interview with a teacher before enrolment. A range of intensive courses for part-time adult and community or further education learners is available. Computer-based **initial assessments** in literacy and numeracy are carried out in the first two days of the programme. The results of the assessments are discussed with the learners and individual learning goals identified. Learners are allocated to appropriate courses from pre-Entry to Level 2, with learning programmes and course activities closely linked to the skills participants need to carry out their work. Learners have the opportunity to review and reflect on their progress using the daily record sheets which feed into their **ILP**s.

During the course learners complete portfolios which are used for internal or external accreditation. All learners receive information and advice about appropriate progression routes available either with the adult education service or with other local providers. At the end of each intensive course, learners' achievements are celebrated at an event attended by the service's directorate teams and senior employer representatives.

Case Study 10
A large college admitting literacy, numeracy and ESOL learners

The college processes significant numbers of learners seeking entry to a range of courses including *Skills for Life* literacy and numeracy courses. Learners may find out about the courses from a range of sources, including family and friends and Student Services (**Signposting**).

If the learner wishes, Student Services will transfer the individual to the Admissions Department to begin the process of joining a programme (**Referral**).

The Admissions Department will conduct a short screening to establish whether the individual has literacy, language or numeracy needs.

The learner will then make an appointment with an appropriate literacy/numeracy teacher for an interview and **initial assessment**. The teacher will then allocate the learner to an appropriate class. The information gathered during this process will be recorded by the teacher, agreed by the learner and passed to the course teacher.

The more detailed **diagnostic assessment** will be carried out by the course teacher, who will use the information to inform and structure the learner's **ILP** and programme of study.

A5 Appendix 5: Assessment Tools

A range of Screening and Initial Assessment tools in literacy, numeracy and ESOL, some paper based and some on-screen, are being developed by the Assessment Tools Project, which the *Skills for Life* Strategy Unit set up in order to provide support materials for assessment in *Skills for Life* teaching. Some of these assessment tools are generic but others have been designed with a number of different audiences in mind:

- ESOL learners
- Workplace learners (generic)
- Workplace learners (sector-specific)

All tools assess up to Level 2 of the adult literacy and numeracy standards, and a user should select the most appropriate tool(s) to meet their needs, and those of the learners. An outline description of each tool is given below.

Screening Tools
The Screening Tools are designed to assess whether an individual has a literacy or numeracy need and are used to identify potential learners who would benefit from a more in-depth initial assessment. The primary function of the Screening Tools is to determine need; they have a narrow purpose, provide a superficial assessment and are not designed to indicate levels. They are being developed for generic, workplace and sector-specific workplace audiences.

The literacy tool can be used to assess listening, reading and writing skills, the numeracy tools to assess number, measures, shape and space, and handling data skills, and the ESOL tool to assess speaking and listening skills.

Initial Assessment Tools
The Initial Assessment Tools are designed to help learners and their teachers to gauge the approximate ESOL, literacy or numeracy skills level learners are working at and thereby to identify what further diagnostic assessment or skills support might be appropriate. However, this is not designed to be a diagnostic tool. The outcome will tell learners whether they are working at one of five 'levels' from Entry 1 to Level 2. The items are all set in a context relevant to the intended audience (i.e. generic, workplace and sector-specific workplace) and are available in both paper-based and computer formats.

The literacy tool can be used to assess listening, reading and writing skills, the numeracy tools to assess number, measures, shape and space, and handling data skills, and the ESOL tool to assess speaking and listening skills.

ESOL exemplar materials
To accompany the ESOL tools, a pack of exemplar materials has been produced to assist ESOL teachers to achieve a better grasp of the concept of 'levelness'. The materials are mapped to the ESOL core curriculum and consist of actual examples of speaking, writing and reading texts

taken from the work of ESOL learners.

The tools will be available free of charge from DfES Publications (Prolog). For up-to-date details on release dates, please visit:
http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus

Tel: 0845 6022260
Fax: 0845 6033360
Textphone: 07845 6055560
E-mail: dfes@prolog.uk.com

A6 Appendix 6: Notes on Questions Used in Initial Interviews

Most organisations have a list of questions on which to base the interview element of the initial assessment. The questions often appear on, for example, an initial interview form or an admissions form. Some of the commonest question areas are listed below, together with some notes on issues that may arise.

It must be remembered that successful interviewing is a very skilled activity. The wording of the questions on the form and the order in which they appear, however important, are less important than the teacher's skills in:

- putting learners at their ease
- listening sensitively
- reading body language
- knowing when to prompt and when to wait for a response
- phrasing and ordering questions to respond to the learner
- building confidence.

The following is **not** an exhaustive list of interview questions; rather, it is an outline of a few key issues that may need to be considered in an interview.

Question area	**Commentary**
The reasons for coming to the centre/course	Depending on language skills, most learners are happy to discuss their reasons for coming to the centres. However, care should be taken to avoid being perceived as 'probing' into areas that are 'none of your business'.
Previous learning programmes	It may help to use the college system to track college-based learners who have attended the college previously. Some learners may not wish to supply this information, preferring to start with a clean slate. For ESOL learners, answers to questions in this area may reveal the standard of education reached in their home country.
Previous qualifications	For some *Skills for Life* learners, this may not be a productive area to explore. For some ESOL learners, it may reveal significant professional qualifications.

Previous/current employment	This may provide useful information about areas of interest relevant to the selection of learning materials. This is an area which should be approached circumspectly with ESOL learners.
Aspirations and ambitions	Some learners will have clear ideas of where they want to go. Some may be realistic; others less so. Some will be simply focused on the course for which they are applying and will not have thought beyond that. This information is usually translated into long-term learning goals on the ILP.
Literacy, language, numeracy difficulties	Most learners will express a view on what they believe they find difficult. Many will present themselves as more able and many (probably the majority) as less able than they really are. The experienced teacher will always want to compare the learner's perception (helpful though this is) with the results of the initial assessment. In many cases, the teacher will be able to show the learners that they have a higher level of skill than they had thought.