



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

---

COMMITTEE  
FOR EMPLOYMENT  
AND LEARNING

---

**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
(Hansard)

---

**Qualifications Required to Deliver  
Essential Skills**

14 September 2011

**NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY**

---

**COMMITTEE  
FOR EMPLOYMENT  
AND LEARNING**

---

**Qualifications Required to Deliver Essential Skills**

---

14 September 2011

**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Basil McCrea (Chairperson)  
Mr Thomas Buchanan (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Jim Allister  
Mr Chris Lyttle  
Mr Barry McElduff  
Mr David McIlveen  
Mr Pat Ramsey  
Mr Alastair Ross

**Witnesses:**

Ms Yvonne Croskery ) Department for Employment and Learning  
Mr John McGuigan )

**The Chairperson:**

We now have a briefing from departmental officials on the consultation on the qualifications required to deliver essential skills. Members have been provided with a copy of the consultation document. I welcome Yvonne Croskery and John McGuigan.

**Mr John McGuigan (Department for Employment and Learning):**

Good morning. I am the Department's head of essential skills, and Yvonne Croskery is head of further education (FE) policy. We are here to answer questions on the correspondence issued by the Department to the Committee on 4 August, which was to advise members about the Department's planned consultation on a proposal to revise the qualification to teach essential skills. The consultation is scheduled to commence on Monday 19 September and will last for 12

weeks.

**The Chairperson:**

The papers are in the pack. Do members have any questions, or do you want to rely on me to ask questions while you read the papers?

**Mr Allister:**

Are there people in the further education colleges teaching subjects such as what was once called woodwork who do not have any formal qualification?

**Ms Yvonne Croskery (Department for Employment and Learning):**

That is not the case. The Department's circular FE 12/09 requires a person teaching in further education to hold a degree in their subject or, in the example that you used, where a degree is not available in that subject area, the highest qualification available. Such persons have to undertake to complete a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (Further Education) (PGCE (FE)) within three years of being employed, with the first year being completed in the first year of their teaching.

**Mr Allister:**

What does the proposal change?

**Ms Croskery:**

The proposal brings essential skills into line with FE, so that the qualification requirements will be aligned in the framework for further education and training and employment across the Department for Employment and Learning's (DEL) programmes. At present, there is an anomaly in that essential skills is at a lower —

**The Chairperson:**

Where does that fit with community groups and things?

**Ms Croskery:**

Without prejudice to whatever the consultation brings into the Department, if there is consensus and it proceeds, any new entrants teaching essential skills in a government-funded programme, regardless of setting or whether it is in a community setting, will have to meet the requirements.

However, those who meet our current requirements until 31 July 2012 will continue to be recognised by the Department.

**Mr Allister:**

What are your current requirements?

**Mr McGuigan:**

The current requirements are that the person possesses both a subject specialism and a teaching specialism at level 4. Initially, when the essential skills strategy was introduced, there were constraints with regard to the availability of appropriately trained staff. However, through the tutor education policy that we put in place, which included funding Queen's University and several of the colleges to deliver those courses, we have successfully addressed those constraints. That means that we have now over 1,000 trained essential skills tutors who will supplement the existing cohort. In essence, we are now in a position to remove the anomaly and ensure that all who start to teach essential have a degree specialism.

**Mr Allister:**

How many people in the current system do not meet that requirement?

**Mr McGuigan:**

With regard to level 4?

**Mr Allister:**

How many do not meet the level 5 qualification that you are bringing in?

**Ms Croskery:**

At the minute, the essential skills tutors do not hold this qualification, but the Department's proposal is to continue to recognise those who are already teaching with the old standard, so that that does not apply. Those recognised by the Department as meeting the old standard can continue to teach because that is what applied when they were recruited. These conditions will apply only to new people who have entered teaching after that date who are brand new and have never been essential skills tutors.

**Mr McGuigan:**

Further to that, Mr Allister, the Department sets the base criteria. We did a survey of the continuing professional development of essential skills tutors that shows that most tutors progressed to PGCE (FE) and a few have gone on to do master's qualifications.

The Department sets the base qualification. Having looked at the evidence, it is now our intention to establish a degree as the baseline — that is, a level 5 qualification — and that will remove the anomaly.

**Mr Allister:**

You do not think that that will impede the community provision in any way?

**Ms Croskery:**

We do not anticipate that it will. The tutors delivering government-funded programmes through community groups, who meet the requirements as they are at the minute, will continue to be recognised. Therefore, a voluntary group, for example, can continue to employ such a person to deliver essential skills because this applies only if it brings in a brand new recruit.

**Mr McGuigan:**

Our analysis of the community groups that provide essential skills training shows that they bring in somebody from their local FE college to deliver it. All of those delivering it are appropriately qualified.

**Mr Allister:**

If the qualification is now higher, will they have to pay more?

**Ms Croskery:**

Will who have to pay more?

**Mr Allister:**

The community groups who are bringing in the tutors.

**Ms Croskery:**

There will be a cost associated with completing the certificate in teaching in the first year, which

will be applicable to them with the PGCE.

**Mr Allister:**

Sorry, a cost to whom?

**Ms Croskery:**

A cost to the employer; but they are entitled to recruit someone who meets the former qualification. Anyone who is registered as an essential skills tutor who is already teaching and has applied for a job with a community group would be able to move in with the requirements as they were before. It is only where someone has never taught before that they will have to complete the certificate and training.

**Mr Allister:**

So, where is the extra cost?

**Mr McGuigan:**

Is your question with regard to the cost to the provider?

**Mr Allister:**

Yes.

**Mr McGuigan:**

With regard to bringing essential skills provision in from the college, all that is provided free of charge by the colleges. Community groups then make some form of arrangement with their local college for a nominal fee to be paid, for example, to cover the travel and subsistence incurred by the college tutor. The community or voluntary group will cover such nominal charges, but the provision to the learner remains free.

**Mr P Ramsey:**

You are very welcome. It is an interesting concept, and one can understand some of the rationale for it. If you are trying to increase literacy and numeracy skills, you need the essential skills to make a difference. I take Jim's point that, at some stage, there must have been an audit that enabled the Department to know that there are 400 or 500 people in the system who do not have a level 5 qualification. There must be some evidence to tell us the numbers. I look forward to the

consultation to hear the perspectives of the colleges, the lecturers' union and others. On the whole, the proposals look sensible. As the Chair said, colleges who do community outreach education programmes have found it difficult to get people to come forward with the absolutely necessary skills. Will you still have that difficulty?

**Mr McGuigan:**

The colleges have told us that the demand for essential skills tutors has been met and that, because of the training programmes that we have had in place, there will be limited opportunities. We know that approximately 500 essential skills tutors are employed across Northern Ireland. Over the period of the essential skills strategy, a pre-existing cohort of qualified staff was in place. They were not able to meet the demand, and the Department put in place arrangements through Queen's University and the colleges and has now trained more than 1,000 staff to supplement that pool. That has satisfied the demand.

It is a multidimensional and complex area, and the international evidence from the likes of McKenzie shows that, in countries that perform most effectively in assessments such as the programme for international student assessment (PISA) and the progress in international reading literacy study (PIRLS), the education is provided by those with the minimum of a degree. Very often, for example in Finland, it is provided by someone with a master's qualification in the subject specialism. We are looking to ensure that we remove the anomaly whereby staff could come in initially and teach with a level 4 qualification. That will be moved to become a degree requirement.

**Mr P Ramsey:**

Given that you are trying to hit the targets that you are aiming for in various areas, including literacy and numeracy, is the onus not on the colleges to bring those who do not make the bar up to standard? You are currently giving a bye ball to those colleges.

**Ms Croskery:**

We want to start from where we are. Over the next number of years, the Department will look at whether we need to raise the bar over a longer period.

**Mr P Ramsey:**

How many are there?

**Mr McGuigan:**

Sorry?

**Mr P Ramsey:**

How many people have not raised to level 5? How many are short of that?

**Mr McGuigan:**

As the employers, the colleges have the responsibility for the professional development of their staff. An extensive survey that we undertook two years ago indicated that the cohort of people who had not undertaken professional development was fewer than five. In essence, the colleges themselves have moved on that. It was undertaken on our behalf.

**Mr Lyttle:**

Pat asked about how many people are not currently at the level that is to be introduced; he did not ask about how many people had undertaken professional development.

**Ms Croskery:**

At the minute, all our essential skills tutors who are delivering government programmes, including further education, must meet our current requirement, which is a level 4 qualification. The people who do not hold a degree and are currently employed will continue to be employed.

**Mr Lyttle:**

How many of those people are there?

**Mr McGuigan:**

There are over 500 essential skills tutors in FE.

**The Chairperson:**

The question is how many of them already hold a level 5 qualification.

**Mr McGuigan:**

From the evidence that we have, the vast majority of them are undertaking qualifications that will allow them —



**The Chairperson:**

Why are we going through this?

**Mr McGuigan:**

It was a matter of good practice, because there are a cohort of students who are finishing off their studies. It is to ensure that all the Government Departments are aware of the standards, which should be set at a level 5 qualification.

**Mr Allister:**

Where I got lost was on the answer to Pat, when you stated that there were five. Five what?

**Mr McGuigan:**

I apologise. You asked how many of them would now not meet the standards.

**Mr P Ramsey:**

How many have applied under the new criteria? How many people who are presently employed would not make it if they made an application under those criteria?

**Mr McGuigan:**

We do not know that.

**The Chairperson:**

I suspect that we need some training in essential skills. We do not seem to be able to get the numbers right.

**Mr McGuigan:**

We do know the numbers. In essence, we are protecting all those who are actually currently —

**Mr P Ramsey:**

I understand that.

**Ms Croskery:**

John, do we know how many people are employed at the moment as essential skills tutors in

further education? Do you have that figure?

**Mr McGuigan:**

I think it is 503.

**Ms Croskery:**

At the moment, our criterion is only that they must meet the formal qualifications up to level 4. They may have a degree.

**The Chairperson:**

Where did the number five come from?

**Mr McGuigan:**

When we went out and undertook a tutor questionnaire on their professional development, it indicated that most of them had actually reached level 5 and above. The sample indicated that fewer than 5 people did not have a level 5 qualification.

**The Chairperson:**

Out of how many that you sampled?

**Mr McGuigan:**

We got a response rate of over 200.

**The Chairperson:**

So, that is 2%. We are all in favour of raising standards. I do not know how expensive it is to do a consultation, but, in this particular case, I think it is a waste of time. You should just issue a directive. I have a few questions. You can tell me whether that is possible. We are all for consultation, but not consultation for consultation's sake.

**Ms Croskery:**

We decided on a consultation because we understand that there might be a cohort of people out there who are taking forward qualifications, and we want to make sure that we seek the views of everybody who the policy will affect. It is a safeguard just to make sure that we give them an opportunity. There are some people who have a deeply held view that, if we raise the barrier to

degree level, they will never have a degree in English or maths, for example.

**The Chairperson:**

OK; that is a different issue, and it is one that I want to come on to. I am happy for members to come back in on it. An organisation called LSDA NI came to see me. Who are they?

**Ms Croskery:**

That is the Learning and Skills Development Agency in Northern Ireland. It is a non-statutory organisation that delivers a range of educational support across Northern Ireland.

**The Chairperson:**

Its representatives spoke to me about essential skills and the good work that they do. Where do they fit in to this?

**Ms Croskery:**

It was funded by the Department to give some support to essential skills tutors to make sure that they continue to reach the professional standards required. They give some post-inspection support as well.

**The Chairperson:**

Where does it fit in to this bit about having to get a level 5 qualification?

**Ms Croskery:**

That has no implications for it. It does not deliver teaching qualifications. It is a support organisation for professional development support and post-inspection support for organisations. It does not deliver qualifications.

**The Chairperson:**

We might be interested in the whole issue about maths and English — the literacy and numeracy provision. I look at the numbers you have got here, which are quite staggering. They include 96,000 enrolments and 37,000 individuals. It is not a small piece of work to be carrying on. That is why I was looking at whether you really did have the tutors to do it, because, at 500, you were talking of class sizes of about 80:1 at one stage, if I got my maths right. This is a priority. It is important that new forms of doing numeracy and literacy can entice and encourage people who

have got to the ages of 16 to 19 without certain skills. They should have the latest techniques. The purpose of you raising it to level 5 is presumably because to take that on board.

**Ms Croskery:**

Our view is that, by raising the standards, we will ensure that second-chance learners, who have had a bad experience the first time around, will get a top-class service and quality of teaching and learning from someone who has a degree in the subject specialism that they are delivering.

**The Chairperson:**

Finally, is there an issue with what teachers do after they get their primary teaching qualification? I am not sure how professional development picks things up, but, certainly in the FE sector, we want lecturers and community groups to avail themselves of the initiative so that they are using the latest techniques. If you were to consult on that, I would support you. Simply telling people that they need to go up for a degree does not do it justice.

**Ms Croskery:**

It includes the aim that, in future, all those employed in community groups who enter teaching and meet the new requirements will undertake a certificate in teaching, which is equivalent to year 1 of the PGCE. That should answer your question. The course is designed specifically for new entrant teachers in FE, the community and voluntary sector and training organisations, so that they develop skills and bring forward new ideas and concepts: pedagogy for delivering essential skills in numeracy, literacy, and information and communication technology.

**Mr P Ramsey:**

I know that the consultation starts on Monday, but it would be useful at an early stage, even without a formal presentation from the employing bodies, which, presumably, are the colleges, to get initial comments from them. Could we write to them to ensure that they are in sync with what you are doing?

**Ms Croskery:**

They have been brought in on this. They were part of the development through a series of working groups.

**Mr McGuigan:**

The colleges have been fully apprised, and they helped to inform —

**Mr P Ramsey:**

To be apprised is one thing, but support is another.

**Mr McGuigan:**

They helped to inform and develop the proposals that have come forward. They have been involved in the process since January 2010.

**The Chairperson:**

We will think about how to do this. We are not being unhelpful. We are delighted that you are doing such excellent work, but I think that you will find that most if not all the people on the Committee are passionate about essential skills and about helping people to get a second chance. That has not always met with success, so we would be delighted to learn more about how you go about it. I just wonder whether we are pulling all the strands together, because there are various providers, including those in the community sector. In fact, I remember when some budgets were moved to the FE sector and people said that we had taken money away from them. It is not clear to us that this is working in the way in which we want it to work, so we might use the fact that you are consulting to get more information.

**Mr McGuigan:**

In the past two months, you will have seen the performance figures for qualifications in essential skills, and the Department has continued to commit significant resources to essential skills and to focus on the quality of provision. This year, we saw the highest ever level of achievement by students, particularly at level 2 and across numeracy. So, the Department has focused significantly on that, and part of the policy is to ensure that all people, regardless of setting, get the same standard of provision.

**The Chairperson:**

I have seen numeracy rise, but, I am not sure, have literacy levels fallen slightly?

**Mr McGuigan:**

There has been a balancing. If you look at the figures, you will see that, in Northern Ireland,

literacy had a slight lead on numeracy. Numeracy has now taken a slightly higher percentage in performance.

**The Chairperson:**

It is an issue in which the Committee will want to take an interest. We will work out how best to get a briefing and come back on where this fits in to the overall strategy. However, in general, we are content for you to go forward with the consultation exercise. Nevertheless, in coming to the Committee, there is always a danger that we will ask questions that are not in the brief.

**Mr D McIlveen:**

People around this table deal with community groups day in and day out, so you will probably forgive us if we are a little bit precious about them. A community group might have used an essential skills tutor to provide a particular level of teaching for x years, but, next month, a new community group might be set up across the road with an essential skills tutor doing exactly the same thing, but now with a level 5 qualification. Will there be support for that existing tutor if he or she feels — and I use this term guardedly — at a competitive disadvantage to the one across the road? Will there be assistance within this policy to ensure that a tutor who has been serving the community faithfully and very well for the past 10 years, for example, can “improve” his or her level? Will there be funding to allow that to happen within this policy?

**Ms Croskery:**

I will answer your question as best I can. Tutors who deliver a government-funded DEL programme — for Training for Success or an apprenticeship, for example — already go through the certificate in teaching and hold a level 4 qualification. That is a prerequisite of their delivering a government programme and will have been part of their tender specification.

If they are delivering a Department for Social Development essential skills-type programme — there are very few; most of those organisations use the colleges to deliver the teaching because they are best qualified to do so. I do not want to say that there are none, because I do not have the exact figures. At the minute, that tutor would not do the Certificate in Teaching unless they were delivering a programme for DEL. The employer can consider developing that person, but it is a matter for that employer. We want to look at that.

From little acorns, great oak trees grow. This is the start; it is not the end. We want to ensure

that community groups continue to progress and get opportunities. We might have to look at ensuring that people hold the level 4 teaching certificate. At this stage, we have no plans for DEL to use its funding to provide the certificate and training for people who are not delivering our programmes. However, the bulk of essential skills is delivered by DEL. Therefore, those people already go through professional development training through the Certificate in Teaching. It is part and parcel of the process.

**Mr D McIlveen:**

My concern is the possibility that we will get it in the neck from some community groups. They may feel that they are being set at a disadvantage.

**Mr McGuigan:**

Community groups that have staff who are eligible to deliver essential skills will remain in place. There are no plans to remove those.

**Ms Croskery:**

Or to affect their employment or status.

**The Chairperson:**

David's point is that, some time in the future, they may feel that they are at a competitive disadvantage. Someone coming in with a level 5 certificate may beat someone who has level 4. Even though you say that it does not matter because they are both eligible to apply, the feeling may be that —

**Mr McGuigan:**

Evidence shows that most essential skills providers undertake continual professional development. We have always encouraged that.

**The Chairperson:**

We have had a good look at this.

**Mr Lyttle:**

May I ask one last question? Does the continual professional development equate to gaining a degree?

**Ms Croskery:**

No; it is the successful completion of either year 1 of the PGCE (FE) or, for those employed in further education, the two-year PGCE (FE) in its entirety, within the first three years of employment. At the moment, if someone moves into an organisation to deliver essential skills for one of DEL's programmes, that person needs to complete successfully the Certificate in Teaching, which is year 1 of the PGCE, within the first year of being recruited by that organisation.

If you do not mind, I will go back to your question. The very reason that we are holding this consultation is so that people who have issues, such as those who you mentioned, will come back and tell us so that we can think about those issues. We are consulting because we want to hear the views of all the people affected.

**The Chairperson:**

Is everyone content? We are interested in the whole issue of essential skills —

**Ms Croskery:**

More generally?

**The Chairperson:**

— more generally. I am not sure that Committee members generally are aware of the numbers to which you have referred. There will be an issue of finding out cause and effect. For example, is the rise in numeracy because of your interventions? Let us hope that it is. We would like to look at that.

**Mr McGuigan:**

On behalf of the Department, we would be more than happy to make a presentation on essential skills to show how we use information to ensure supply and demand.

**The Chairperson:**

We will schedule a briefing. You will take on the point that David and others made that it is of interest to us because of our connections with community groups. There are very few things that are more important than being able to give people basic literacy and numeracy skills. We will



deal with it in that way. In the meantime, thank you very much for your attendance. I wish you well.