

Training Basic Skills Teachers

# Best Practice Guidelines



Education and Culture

**Socrates**  
Comenius





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## Introduction

The training basic skills teachers project, financed by the European Union's Socrates Comenius Programme, was established to identify best practice in the training of basic skills teachers. The project ran for two years, culminating in a final dissemination conference in September 2005. The partners were:

- Lewisham College, London, England
- IAL-FVG, Pordenone, Italy
- Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic
- University of Rostock, Rostock, Germany

The partners researched the methodology used during both the training of teachers, and during the teaching of basic skills, through extensive observation visits and discussion. Through the project, they were able to examine best practice on a transnational basis. Best practice in teacher training was found to be influenced by academic traditions and concepts of basic skills in each nation state. Each country had its own needs and traditions which were reflected in the methodology chosen by educational practitioners, and in the form of basic skills provision. The partners agreed on the importance of the exchange of ideas in teaching and training and in celebrating the diversity of pedagogies/andragogies.

At the same time, a convergence of views was also observed. These guidelines summarise the main findings as presented in the final project report. A number of questions are raised about the methodologies and approaches used in training teachers, but, more importantly, they reflect common and shared experience. Practising trainers, tutors and managers in the area of Basic Skills and Teacher Training are offered the opportunity to benefit from this collaborative effort. These guidelines also highlight the critical contribution that teacher training can make to the quality of teaching and learning.



## Summary of national context in each partner country



### Lewisham College, London, England

There are various routes in England to becoming a fully qualified teacher:

1. Three year, full-time Bachelor of Education (BEd). This is an integrated course.
2. One year, full-time postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE). This course is taken after the first degree course; hence, training is not fully integrated.
3. Two year, part-time Certificate in Education (Cert Ed). This route is specifically for the post-16, post-compulsory education sector. It is the route generally used in further education (FE) colleges. It does not give Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), although discussions are currently in progress as to Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS). The course is not integrated, although teachers may relate assignments given to their own specialist subject areas. The only integrated course is the Certificate in Further Education Teaching Stage 3 with the Certificate for ESOL Subject Specialists.

Since 2001, the Skills for Life national strategy has been instrumental in training adult basic skills teachers. Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) – formerly known as FENTO – developed national standards for teachers in this sector. Skills for Life Professional Development Centres were set up to design and deliver subject specialist teacher training courses for teachers of adult language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) in accordance with these national standards.

The courses are aimed at teachers of learners with low skill levels, i.e. below those of an average 11 year old (see Moser Report; national core curricula). Basic skills covers Entry 1-Level 2 (equivalent to GCSE, the exam generally taken at 16 in schools) on the NQF (National Qualifications Framework). Key skills covers up to Level 3 (equivalent to A-level, the exam generally taken at 18 in schools).

These courses run at Level 4 on the NQF, which is equivalent to undergraduate level/first degree. Accreditation of prior experience and learning (APEL) is available for three of the five literacy (or numeracy) units (personal skills) for those who have been awarded a first degree in English (or Maths) as a subject specialism. Other units include: personal and social factors, and teaching practice.

For literacy and numeracy, the courses are generally not integrated with generic aspects of teaching. For Language (ESOL), the courses are generally fully integrated, combining both subject specification and generic teaching knowledge, as well as teaching practice.

## **IAL-FVG, Pordenone, Italy**

IAL-FVG runs similar courses to Lewisham College: vocational training for young people in, for example, the construction and hospitality industries. IAL also has a number of learners for whom Italian is a second or other language, e.g. from Romania, Croatia, Slovenia. For example, maths (numeracy) classes are part of the bricklaying programme for young male adults from Romania.



New basic skills in the form of IT, ICT, and ILT as well as foreign languages, e.g. English, are also high on the agenda in IAL.

Tutors in IAL are in general trained and qualified in their own professional fields, e.g. accounting, but not necessarily trained as teachers. IAL recognises that there is a need to professionalise the teaching force and to engage in the training of tutors, e.g. in the areas of classroom management, lesson planning, catering for differentiation and learner styles, language support, etc. In response, and as a result of recent visits to Lewisham College as part of the Comenius project, IAL has recently instigated forums for tutors where they can meet together to discuss teaching issues.

Teacher training in Italy is generally aimed at secondary school teachers and consists of four years' training. However, teacher training courses (CELI, which is similar to CELTA) awarded by the University of Perugia also exist. There are no subject specific teacher training courses at present in adult basic skills, as in England and Wales. Numeracy is generally classed under maths and/or physics; literacy is classed under Italian language and literature.

## Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic



As Masaryk University stated in the project survey in autumn 2004:

‘The teaching of basic skills is not considered and treated as a special item of government educational policy in the Czech Republic. Nevertheless, there are programmes or courses that deal with this phenomenon. For this reason, and to have a better understanding of the basic skills national context in the Czech Republic, it is necessary to see this issue in broader historical as well as educational contexts.’

(p. 1, *Basic Skills National Context: Czech Republic*, Masaryk University Report, 2004)

In the Czech Republic, as in Germany, teacher training is designed and delivered by universities, such as Masaryk University. Teacher training programmes consist of three to five years of studies at university (two subjects + pedagogy and psychology). Both concurrent and consecutive models exist.

Adult basic skills teaching is provided for in part under mainstream education. For adults who have these needs, they can attend upper secondary schools, either in mainstream classes or arrange additional support, for example, in evening classes with teachers outside of their normal working hours. Upper secondary level covers some of the same functions as further education colleges in the UK: they both cater for young adults of 16-18, and adults who wish to return to finish their education.

There is no specific teacher training for the teaching of adult basic skills.

Provision for Czech as a foreign language is currently free:

‘Foreign nationals are unconditionally provided with free education within compulsory schooling. Immigrants are ensured free courses of the Czech language.’

(p. 7, *Basic Skills National Context: Czech Republic*, Masaryk University Report, 2004)

Children for whom Czech is a foreign language are integrated into mainstream school classes. Currently, the number of these pupils is not high; but it is possible that this may change in the future.

There is no specific teacher training for teachers of Czech as a foreign language: teachers are usually trained as Czech language teachers.

## University of Rostock, Germany



As in the Czech Republic, teacher training in Germany is designed and delivered by universities, such as the University of Rostock. Teacher training programmes consist of four years of integrated studies at university (two main subjects + pedagogy; for primary school teachers, pedagogy is a main subject + German, mathematics, and one optional subject.) This first stage is termed the Staatsexamen.

This is followed by the second stage, consisting of two years of practical education in a school supervised by approved teachers (the staff of LISA: Landesinstitut für Schule und Ausbildung, the regional centre for schools).

Specialist training for German as a foreign language (Deutsch als Fremdsprache - DAF) exists, consisting of two years of special studies alongside standard teacher training (outlined above). There is no specific exam.

Adult basic skills teaching (for example, in literacy and numeracy) is provided under the Volkshochschule system of adult education. Classes and individual tutorial support are generally delivered by volunteers or retired teaching staff. There is currently no specific teacher training in this area.

However, there have been new initiatives in this area. One of these is the APOLL project (Alfa-Portal Literacy Learning) between the German Adult Education Association (Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband e.V.) and the Federal Literacy Association (Bundesverband Alphabetisierung e.V.). APOLL has also created an e-learning portal, [ich-will-schreiben-lernen.de](http://ich-will-schreiben-lernen.de), for adult literacy learners.

## Basic Skills – a definition

The definition of what constituted basic skills was found to vary between partners. A favoured term was key competencies, and in most partner countries, these would be developed during the primary and secondary levels of mainstream school education.

This project limited the definition of basic skills to language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) – the UK definition. Basic skills go up to Level 2 on the English National Qualifications Framework (NQF). It was found that this definition could be broadened to include the new basic skills of ICT and foreign language learning, as well as the wider range of ‘key skills/competencies’ of problem solving, learning to learn, and working with others, which go up to Level 3 on the NQF in England.

For our partners, the concept of literacy is usually covered under the national language; and the concept of numeracy is usually covered under mathematics. The teaching of the host language to non-native speakers is divided into English as a foreign language (EFL) and English to speakers of other languages (ESOL) only in the UK. In the partner countries, the host language for non-native speakers is termed as German/Italian/Czech as a foreign language. This is partly due to historical reasons. It is generally acknowledged that the demand for the teaching of the host language may increase in the near future.

The theme of adult basic skills has been of key importance in the UK educational agenda. The Skills for Life initiative has aimed to professionalise the training of basic skills teachers. Since the introduction of national curricula in 2000, specialist teacher training courses have been developed, along with changes to existing teacher training programmes to ensure the embedding of key/basic skills in the curriculum. It was found that such specialist teacher training programmes do not currently exist in the partner countries; it was acknowledged that this is due to historical reasons.



# General guidelines for best practice in teacher training

These guidelines relate to both initial and in-service teacher training. It was found that forms of both of these are provided in all the partners' countries. The following are points of agreement between the partners as to what constitutes best practice in teacher training.

## Values

- Having and sharing a vision of what teachers are being trained to do and communicating fundamental principles and values as laid down in laws
- Being part of a network which acts to achieve unified and shared visions – but using different tactics; not dwelling solely on the methodologies of teaching the discipline but also reflecting on the professional role of the teacher and the ethical, communicative and interpersonal aspects of being a teacher

“It is important to consider the pedagogical and interpersonal qualities of the teacher. There can sometimes be a lot of talk of instruments, lifelong learning, and training but hardly any references to attitudes e.g. listening, understanding, assisting.” *Italy*

- Having awareness that it is not enough to be a good teacher to become a trainer and attending appropriate trainer training where it is available

## Standards

- Reflecting on practice – the use of professional development journals is extremely valuable for learning and gives insight
- Participating in and initiating one's own continuous professional development

“It is interesting to point out that in Italy, with the autonomy of the schools, it is single institutions who are responsible for the professional updating of their personnel. This means that updating is tailored to the needs of the individual institutions.” *Italy*

- Encouraging reading and research, including action research

“Research in schools has recently been invigorated by the law of school autonomy which contains an article on the autonomy of research and development. However, the incentives and the necessary agreement between schools and regional and local education authorities are lacking”. *Italy*

- Encouraging informed debate and progressive opinion forming as part of the trainees' preparation for teaching

## Delivery

- Delivering training sessions using similar methodology to that expected to be used in the teaching classroom, i.e. training teachers in the way that you want them to teach. (Examples of this are to be found below under ‘teaching’.)

“We are not presenting models for good practice, but want to create a deeper understanding of the principles of teaching and learning to put teachers in the position to analyse and reflect on their teaching in order to improve it.” *Germany*

“It is difficult to suggest similar activities in our country. The training of teachers (at least at an academic level) is orientated towards reflective practices (as opposed to actions). In Italy there is no ‘culture’ which would allow the definition of such training in such a rigid way; it is unlikely that this model could be copied in Italy. There is no right method (but the method most suited to the style of the learner and the teacher). There is a need to make the methodology more popular and accessible and also to encourage personalisation.” *Italy*

- Having continuous and constant support (for about a year) in the classroom so that a trainee teacher would have guidance and support and be able to see how situations can be managed, conflict can be resolved in the classroom, etc.

## Content

- Knowing your subject – as with teaching
- Knowing about teaching (e.g. pedagogy/andragogy, methodology, didactics and barriers to learning) and how to communicate knowledge in the best way to other individuals, both learners and teachers – not just being an expert in the subject knowledge of one’s own field

“In Italy ‘knowing about teaching’ has only been recognised recently during the setting up of courses in Teacher Training for Primary School Teachers, and in Secondary School Teacher Training. Before these, there was no special training for initial teacher training and pedagogy but this has now been initiated. The importance of these concepts should be the same in all nations in as far (as has been confirmed) that the teacher is the expert in all techniques of teaching, especially when it is considered that the teacher is not only linked to the specialist field but also to the field of being trained.” *Italy*

- Considering the balance between the above areas of knowledge

“The universal part of the training includes psychology of teaching and learning, of children’s development and socio-psychology (including learning disabilities) and didactics. Methodology is partially included in didactics, but is usually taught in the second, practical part of the training.” *Germany*

- Enabling teachers to understand and manage the learners, by emphasising not only the technical competences of a teacher but also the cross-cutting competences

- Providing APEL (Accreditation of Prior Experience and Learning) procedures to enable learners to build on current knowledge – although it is acknowledged that this can be problematic, as it depends strongly on the quality of the current knowledge of the individual person and also on the quality of institutions where this knowledge was gained. The importance of certification is not because the courses which do not lead to a ‘certificate’ cannot be validated but because with certification the levels of learning are clear and shared. If there were agreement on accreditation, the student could follow various courses which would allow training to take place in different places and institutions

“One of the aspects specific to England is the consideration of the integration of generic and subject specific knowledge in one coherent programme of training, as currently exists in ESOL. Only higher education institutions have established integrated courses for literacy and numeracy. All other courses, such as those run by further education colleges, are generic courses with literacy/numeracy added on but not accredited.” *England*

“There are only integrated courses for teacher training.” *Germany*

“There are only consecutive courses for teacher training.” *Czech Republic*

- Integrating theory and practice

“This is only happening now with the establishment of Primary and Secondary Teacher Training institutions where numerous training activities are programmed and where the tutors come from the teaching sector.” *Italy*

## **General guidelines for best practice in basic skills teaching**

The following guidelines are agreed expectations of a trained teacher in basic skills. These expectations would underpin basic skills teacher training courses.

- Being fully proficient in the subject – and participating in training to obtain a subject specialist qualification, where available/appropriate, as stipulated by law; or on-going updating, especially for vocational training

“In our opinion, the subject specialist qualification should be gained before teaching the subject.” *Czech Republic*

“Being up to date with didactic methods and tools as well as the cognitive methods employed in the acquisition of knowledge.” *Italy*

- Being learner centred – teachers should emphasise the learner and make practice ‘wrap around’ the student
- Managing the classroom environment and the learning process effectively
- Knowing how to work in a team and how to manage people

“In our opinion, the following are best practice for teachers, i.e. helping students to learn how to gain knowledge, how to act, how to live together and conduct themselves (Delors’ four pillars) and thus construct the intellectual road which the students have to follow and to socialise them as citizens in the fundamentals of a democracy; using new technology (ICT, ILT, multimedia); working in groups and assisting in the management of the school/training establishment; involving families in the activities of the institution, where appropriate; communicating and maintaining an effective rapport with the students and the rest of the school community; placing one’s own professionalism in the centre of the school and being aware of the importance and limits of one’s own social role; conducting an audit of one’s own competencies and finding a balance between one’s own continuous lifelong learning and institutional in-service training.”  
*Italy*

- Applying differentiation in the learning process, including materials
- Using a variety of teaching methods and learning materials
- Adapting teaching techniques to meet a variety of learning styles
- Checking learners’ understanding, both continuously/informally and via formal assessment processes to provide evidence of learning taking place, as stipulated by law/national standards
- Being flexible – being able to adapt to the learning situation in an appropriate manner, not just sticking to the plan
- Making sessions engaging and motivating for learners and attending to affective factors

“It is expected that the teacher is able to adopt a variety of teacher roles; less use is usually made of teacher as knowledge giver, explainer and more use of teacher as facilitator, monitor, organiser, etc.” *England*

“The self-discovery method is ideal for the learner but also very time consuming. Therefore an appropriate mixture of self-discovery method and direct explanation method would be a good solution.” *Czech Republic*

“It is considered good practice to encourage learners to learn by the self-discovery method (the inductive approach) rather than relying on direct explanation in the learning process – depending on the subject and on the cognitive style of the learner.” *England*.

“The moment of discovery and of sharing/socialisation of one’s own discoveries is also important so that one’s own discoveries can be shared.” *Italy*

- Focusing on the individual’s needs, via the use of ILPs (individual learning plans), but using other modes, e.g. group work, whole group teaching, where appropriate. This is also dependent on the institution being able to deal with the ILPs and control them effectively and non-bureaucratically

- The use of formative assessment in encouraging independent learning and reflection

“Best practice includes utilising the national curriculum.” *England*

“There is no national curriculum. Until 2004 there was a countrywide teaching plan but since 2005 schools have more competences. Every school creates its own school educational programme.” *Czech Republic*

“There is no national curriculum; curricula are provided by each federal county. National standards of education are being discussed, but not yet agreed.” *Germany*

“There is no national curriculum in Italy.” *Italy*

## **Guidelines for institutional support to teachers**

The partners agreed that best practice for basic skills teachers and for those involved in training them could be achieved with support from institutions. Effective support includes the following:

- Availability of trainer training courses, and encouraging and supporting trainers in attending such courses
- Being inclusive – catering for access for all, widening participation and giving learners choice in their educational arrangements, i.e. to be integrated into the mainstream or to have separate, specialised provision, including those with learning difficulties, language issues and those who require learning support, e.g. those for whom the national language is a second language, those with hearing/speech impairment, those who have been diagnosed as dyslexic

“Trainee teachers choose their specialism at the beginning of their university studies, and have special training in this.” *Germany*

- Supporting the professionalisation of teachers and the raising of standards via training, resource provision, etc.

“This is the duty of L.I.S.A. in the second, practical part of the training.” *Germany*

- Providing specialised information and guidance to support learners’ progression
- Ensuring channels of communication and systems of organisation are efficient and effective to support learners

## Guidelines for national support to teachers

The partners also agreed that best practice for basic skills teachers and for those involved in training them requires support at a national level. This includes:

- A rigorous endorsement and approval process with standardisation procedures for assessment – so that the currency of qualifications and progression paths are made clear to all

“If there were mutual accreditation across Europe, students would be able to follow courses in various places and receive their training in different places and schools. This would strengthen the systems of training.” *Italy*

“Each federal state is responsible for education; national standards in education are being discussed.” *Germany*

- Advice and guidance available for standards set
- Availability of trainer training courses
- Educating the public generally so the importance of the role of the teacher is recognised.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it is fair to say that not all these points may be applicable in every training situation. However, they provide some guidance around which successful teacher training programmes can be developed. They also give a framework for comparison of teacher training methods across four European member states.

All partners agreed on the paramount importance of establishing best practice in an environment where the professionalisation of teachers and trainers is seen as of increasing importance. It is anticipated that the guidelines summarised in this document will act as a basis for development of teacher training programmes.

## Areas for possible future development

- Developing the use of a mentor system during initial and in-service teacher training
- Using interactive materials, ICT and multimedia for materials and in training sessions
- Focussing explicitly on intercultural communication
- Developing systems for the accreditation of prior experience and learning (APEL) in teacher training
- Establishing transnational links and exchanging good practice and innovative ideas transnationally
- Incorporating a European dimension into initial teacher training
- Working towards EU-wide recognition of qualifications



## Further materials

Materials developed and collated during the project are available on the project website:  
<http://www.math.muni.cz/comenius>.

The resources include activities relating to literacy, numeracy and the host language, as well as theoretical background material.

Further information on the national standards can be obtained on the following websites:

UK – <http://www.lifelonglearninguk.org>

Czech Republic – <http://www.skolaonline.cz/pages/RVP.html>

[Project Information] [Partners] [Partner Surveys] [Conference] [Literacy] [Numeracy] [Host language] [Contacts]



PDC PROJECT

 Education and Culture  
**Training Basic Skills Teachers - A Comenius 2.1 Project**

   

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