

# The Impact of Embedding Basic Skills Provision on Learning and Achievement in the Armed Services



### Getting the Right Fit

Ensuring Basic Skills (BS) provision for Armed Forces personnel fits around operational commitments, the existing training regimes and the demands of Service life is a significant strand of the Services' BS implementation strategies. To date, the use of discrete, often short intensive programmes has largely been adopted to meet the needs of learners and their employing officers. Such discrete provision does not always provide the flexibility, cost effectiveness or, most importantly, the sustainable skills improvement that the Services demand. The use of literacy, language and numeracy provision that is embedded within military training is potentially a very effective approach that should be exploited within a mix of delivery options.

### What is Embedded Learning?

Embedded learning combines the development of BS with vocational or other skills, by integrating BS within another learning programme. This is achieved by teaching those specific elements of literacy and numeracy that directly support the development of vocational skills at the most appropriate time to deliver the maximum benefit. Embedded programmes have dual learning goals: in both BS and in the 'host subject'. Embedding should be distinguished from contextualised approaches. The latter uses the context directly relevant to the interests and needs of learners as vehicles to teach literacy, language and numeracy. For example: using the audit of an ammunition store as a scenario for teaching arithmetic rules. The primary learning goal here is improving BS.



Embedded provision should not be seen as BS learning 'by stealth', thus the role of BS within other learning activities should be explained to personnel on embedded programmes.

### **Benefits of Embedding**

- Embedding is associated with higher retention and success rates, both on vocational courses and in higher levels of attainment of BS qualifications. Embedding has the potential, not only to enhance BS learning within the Armed Services, but to support achievement in trade-specific training.
- Through embedding, BS learning can be situated in contexts that are meaningful for learners.

- Embedding encourages learners to value BS and increase motivation. It can be particularly valuable for learners with previous negative experiences of education, because it helps to differentiate the learning experience from mathematics and English lessons in school.
- Embedding can help to normalise BS learning and avoid any stigma associated with more targeted approaches.

### **Requirements for Successful Embedding**

The development of embedded approaches within the Armed Services should be informed by research into the organisational, attitudinal, resource and expertise requirements that underpin successful embedding.



- The effectiveness of embedded approaches depends on both vocational and BS content being delivered by tutors with specialist skills and knowledge. Approaches in which vocational and BS instructors collaborate in delivery tend to be much more successful than models in which vocational tutors are also responsible for the BS content. Building in sufficient time for joint planning between military trainers and BS specialist teachers will be essential to the effective development of embedded programmes within the Armed Services.
- Embedding raises professional development needs for both vocational and BS teachers: to develop their understanding of the 'other' subject and to develop expertise in embedding itself. Any expansion of embedded provision within the Armed Services will require investment in training for both military trainers and civilian BS tutors.
- Ownership of the embedding agenda by vocational staff is important to the effectiveness of embedded programmes, and is likely to be particularly crucial within the Armed Services. Vocational 'embedding champions' have been employed within some organisations to communicate the benefits of embedding and to ensure it meets vocational requirements. A similar approach might facilitate buy-in to embedded approaches within the Armed Services and ensure that the embedding agenda is driven by military training staff as well as education officers.



## The Place of Embedding in the Armed Services' Training Regimes

The Army BS policy describes embedding as the preferred option for the delivery of literacy and numeracy. Embedded approaches are consistent with the policy of integrating BS learning into the career progression route. However, embedded approaches are currently the exception rather than the norm within the Armed Services, and research among BS learners and line managers in particular in the Army suggests that there is currently limited support for embedding as a means of enhancing BS provision. This may be due to a lack of awareness of embedded models, or concern about the challenges involved in integrating BS learning into military training.

There is potential for the embedded approach as an alternative to discrete KS provision within apprenticeships or to discrete tutor-led BS provision for new recruits. In each case, a detailed assessment of the BS demands of the military/vocational training is needed. The integration of literacy and numeracy should not be forced when BS do not have a naturally supporting role within the wider learning programme. It is likely that a combination of discrete, contextualised and embedded provision will be required to fully meet Armed Services' requirements.

Front-loading of KS provision within apprenticeship programmes can enhance learning and achievement, and may be the best approach when resources or expertise are insufficient to support fully embedded delivery.



### Further Research Questions

- What are the opportunities and challenges for embedding within military training and how can these best be exploited?
- What is the optimum blend of provision in terms of cost-effectiveness and efficiency of the Services' training regimes? What is the best option for individual learners?

Further information can be found at:

[www.niace.org.uk](http://www.niace.org.uk) and [www.nrdc.org.uk](http://www.nrdc.org.uk)