

# Assessing literacy and numeracy for safe, effective healthcare

Patient safety, quality and productivity are at risk if staff cannot communicate effectively, or have inadequate numeracy skills.



# What are these tools?

These tools allow employers to assess the literacy and numeracy skill levels of both current staff, and potential employees. This allows you to monitor and control risks, and so assure safe and effective healthcare. It also enables you to more effectively target staff development.

The tools are easy to use and judge actual results against the literacy and numeracy skills needed to work in the sector. The questions are contextualised for a range of healthcare settings. This is to make the situations familiar and the assessment as relevant as possible.

The computer-based tools are adaptive. They change the questions that users are asked, based on their answers to previous questions. This has two advantages:

- users will not be presented with questions that are consistently too easy or too hard
- the assessment can be completed more quickly, with users answering fewer questions.

A mapping table helps users interpret the results for users in each of the four UK countries.

The “Language, Literacy and Numeracy” section of the Skills for Health website also offers a Strategy Flowchart. This shows the steps needed to develop a whole organisation strategy.

# Benefits of assessing literacy and numeracy

- **Reduce the risk of errors in patient care e.g. drug calculations.**
- **Recruit staff who can communicate safely, with adequate numeracy skills.**
- **Monitor the literacy and numeracy of your current employees, and identify areas of risk.**
- **Improve the quality of service provision.**
- **Support your organisation's skills pledge commitment.**
- **Increase staff confidence and help improve career development.**

***“The initial assessment tools are excellent! They will prove invaluable in identifying training needs and should help avoid any risk of quality suffering due to low levels of literacy or numeracy. The tools support our commitment to delivering safe and effective patient care and best of all they are free!”***

**Lizzie Shevlin**

Staff Development Officer,  
Countess of Chester NHS Foundation Trust

# Who are the tools for?

The tools will be of interest to anyone wishing to assess staff's literacy and numeracy levels. This may include union learning representatives, training managers and staff managers.

The tools support workforce development, career planning and career progression. They can also be used to signpost individuals to appropriate learning opportunities.

They can be used at the point of induction, at appraisals, or when preparing staff for other training programmes.

A "whole organisation" approach is recommended. This can be undertaken at any time once the infrastructure to support subsequent training needs is in place. Involving the whole organisation has been shown to improve take-up, and removes any doubts that low levels of literacy and numeracy skills only relate to "basic skills".

## Did you know?

- **42% of staff in the NHS have numeracy skills below Level 1 (equivalent level to GCSE grades D-G)**
- **26% of NHS staff have literacy skills below Level 2 (equivalent level to GCSE grades A\*-C)**

**These statistics apply only to England, but are likely to be similar across the UK.**

# How to use the tools

Before using the tools, organisations must ensure adequate information, advice and guidance is available.

An infrastructure must be in place to fully support individuals both during and following assessment.

Guidance documentation (available on the Skills for Health website) is essential pre-implementation reading and provides further information for organisations on best practice use.

The tools are designed to be flexible and are available in a range of formats including:

- on-line through the Skills for Health website
- as downloads to be put onto individual PCs/laptops or installed on an intranet or network
- in a paper based format where no access to IT is possible.

The tools can be used in an individual or group setting as appropriate.

Where possible, the assessments should be undertaken with the support of trained individuals.

Feedback should be overseen by experienced literacy and numeracy practitioners. Where individuals use the tools on their own initiative, they will be directed back to the Skills for Health website to find support links.

# You might also be interested in:

- Attracting and training your future workforce.
- Getting good people into hard-to-fill entry level posts.
- Setting up your apprenticeship programme.

*For more information see our website, catalogue or leaflet range.*

**To find out more about assessing literacy and numeracy for safe, effective healthcare visit [www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/IATool](http://www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/IATool)**

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## **Make your voice heard**

We represent employers' views to government departments and funding bodies. Join your local e-panel and we can make your voice heard where it matters.

To register, just e-mail us your contact details at [epanel@skillsforhealth.org.uk](mailto:epanel@skillsforhealth.org.uk)