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Back to basics – helping learners overcome their fear of numerical reasoning tests

Day 2 – Parallel V (14.30-15.00)

Do you know that the majority of graduate recruiters use numerical reasoning tests to screen applicants? Do you have many students looking for numeracy test support? What sort of support do you offer? Many university students have not used mathematical skills such as calculating percentages, fractions, ratios and exchange rates in several years. Many have not interpreted mathematical information such as graphs, pie charts or bar charts in several years. Many students become anxious at the thought of taking a numerical reasoning test. Mathematics support for these students, when sought, is often last-minute. Mathematics support for such students, when provided, tends to be urgent individual teaching. This is an inefficient and possibly ineffective use of maths support resources.

A proactive workshop approach to numerical reasoning support has been trialled at De Montfort University. Numerical reasoning workshops run regularly, are open to all DMU students, and participation early in the graduate recruitment process is encouraged. The workshops are HEAR accredited and are jointly run by the Maths Learning Centre and the Careers & Employability Service. During the workshops, background information and preparation tips are provided. Students then tackle a short numerical reasoning test individually and in groups. This process develops numeracy skills, as well as providing an opportunity to develop and demonstrate other employability skills such as team-work, communication, leadership, decision-making and assertiveness.

Participants self-assessed their knowledge and confidence before and after the workshops, and feedback forms were used to gather comments and suggestions. Findings indicate that the workshops have a positive effect on both knowledge and confidence, with average rises of 2.9 and 3.5 respectively (on a ten-point scale). The workshops were popular and feedback comments will be shared.

Plans for extending this support will be detailed, including: in-faculty workshops; learning resource development; and a staff-student partnership to facilitate these workshops and extend their reach. These workshops are easily replicable. Advice for other HEIs and collaborative opportunities will be described.

This links to the conference theme of “Back to basics! The lasting value of face-to-face interaction” as this session provides an innovative solution to the new challenge of supporting large numbers of students seeking mathematics support to refresh their numerical reasoning skills. These workshops are based on face-to-face interaction, but are designed in a way to maximise the effectiveness of limited support staff time.