# Frequently Asked Questions

How are your tests different to other initial assessment materials?
All our tests are norm based which means that you can compare a learner, or group of learners, against any ability level once they have completed a single test. This lets you quickly find out how they perform relative to national standards. There is no need to retest and you can do this as many times as you like!

What are norms?
Norms are sets of data that form a frequency distribution that shows how a large number of learners perform on a standardised test. For example, one norm could be for the reading performance of entry level learners, another for level 1, 2 and so on. When you test a new learner you can choose which level to compare them against and then plot where on the curve their test score falls. Our literacy and numeracy test, the SAS, has norms based on national standards constructed from the test results of 50,000 learners.
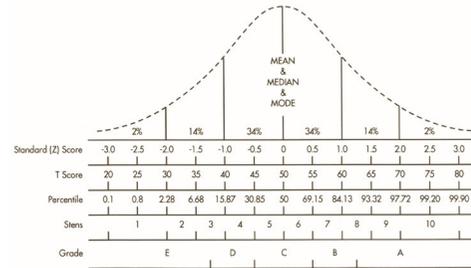
Why use norms?
Normative assessment refers to the process of comparing one test taker to his or her peers. This is opposed to criterion referenced tests where learners need to score an arbitrary percentage to get an A, B, C and so on. The criterion, or cut points, are generally determined by the test constructor based on "gut feeling". If you think about it a score of 70% doesn't tell you very much! If the test was very easy this may not be a good score, if it was very hard it would be. You need to know where a learners score falls in relation to the whole distribution of people who have taken the test previously, i.e. a norm comparison. Norm based tests counter "grade inflation" and are founded on sound statistical principles and are easily justified in annual reporting.

How are your tests more reliable, valid and accurate than other vendors?
Our tests have been designed by experts in psychometric assessment and field trailed to have a high reliability, i.e. if you retest a learner they will have stable results; are valid in the respect that questions assess the concepts they are purportedly testing, i.e. the language usage in a numeracy question is not higher than the numeracy level of the actual question; and accurate in the sense that they let you compare a learner on a continuum of ability rather than just a grade letter, number correct or percentage. In short they take a far more rigorous statistical approach based on proven metrics. The rationale for question construction and reporting methodology can easily be explained and justified. Remember tests may look appealing but that doesn't always mean what they assess and the reports they produce are valid!

Why are your questions better?
All our questions have been field trialled to assess their psychometric properties, i.e. how do learners at different ability levels answer them, do they assess the right concepts and do they differentiate between learners. In the case of our literacy and numeracy test, the SAS, over 300 questions were trialled to produce the final 36 test items.

Is speed of answering important?
Yes. All our tests assess not just accuracy but also time taken to answer each question. Speed of answering is an important factor to be considered when making judgements about ability. Reports detail Power (combination of Speed and Accuracy) and Speed (purely how fast questions were answered). This enables you to evaluate not just performance but also thinking efficiency or speed of working. You can quickly identify learners who are working too slowly or guessing and clicking-through. Working too slowly can also indicate dyslexia.

A short test doesn't seem very thorough?
Learners like short tests. We keep the number of questions down by combining speed and accuracy measures. Traditional psychometric tests rely on scales of between 12 and 18 questions to retain statistical power. However in the case of our literacy and numeracy test, the SAS, this would mean a test of between 72 and 108 questions rather than the 36 questions it has if we didn't use speed of answering.

**Can we import and export to and from MIS and ILR systems?**
Yes. We realise that centralised management and reporting are crucial. That's why our systems can import learner details and course enrolments from all leading MIS systems. What's more we enable you to store result data within your own ILR systems. By linking with MIS it's easy to produce reports across courses, tutor groups or even across the whole college.

How are tests delivered?
All our tests are delivered in a web browser so they can be taken anywhere in college. They are self-paced and are preceded by a short video showing how questions are answered. In the case of the SAS there are three practice items followed by 36 real questions split into literacy and numeracy.

How long does a test take?
Tests typically take around 15 minutes for most learners. As we have carried out detailed field trails we can give you time estimates for different learners who take the same test. This helps you plan testing sessions and allocate appropriate resources. From the graph you can clearly see that more able learners complete the test more quickly and with less spread of times whereas those of lower ability typically take a little longer.
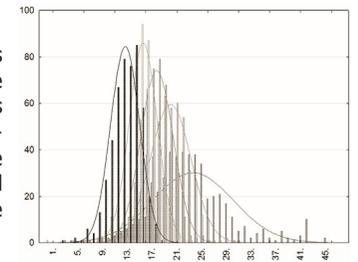
What ability levels are your tests suitable for?
Our tests encompass all levels. There is not a specific test for each level however. Everyone takes the same test but at their own pace. Because we take speed of answering into account our statistically derived norms show that more able students answer more questions correctly in a faster time than less able students.

Can you show me what happens when I compare a learner against different levels?
Yes. The example shows performance for reading on the SAS. Each set of scores shows relative performance against an increasingly able norm comparison group. The learner has always answered the same number of questions correctly and always taken the same time. The crucial difference is that when you compare a learner against more able groups typically their relative performance is poorer. The first group is an entry level norm group (A) who against this learner has performed well. In fact they have done better than 99% of the entry level reading norm. As the ability of the comparison norm group is raised their relative performance reduces until they fall below average at Level 4 (B). Each profile shows Power (speed and accuracy) and Speed (time taken to answer questions). Average performance in reading for all comparison groups is shown centrally. Conceptually you could draw a normal distribution curve with its peak around this point.

	Sub-test	M	Scale score	Percentile rank
A Functional Skills Entry 1 [FE1]	Reading	P [5/6]	○○○○○○○○○○●	99
		S [2:48]	○○○○○○○○○●○	93
Functional Skills Entry 2 [FE2]	Reading	P [5/6]	○○○○○○○○○●○	96
		S [2:48]	○○○○○○○○●○○	82
Functional Skills Entry 3 [FE3]	Reading	P [5/6]	○○○○○○○○●○○	94
		S [2:48]	○○○○○○○●○○○	78
Functional Skills Level 1 / KS 1 [FL1]	Reading	P [5/6]	○○○○○○○●○○○	92
		S [2:48]	○○○○○○○●○○○	82
Functional Skills Level 2 / KS 2 [FL2]	Reading	P [5/6]	○○○○○○●○○○○	78
		S [2:48]	○○○○○●○○○○○	62
Level 3 / KS 3 [FL3]	Reading	P [5/6]	○○○○○●○○○○○	61
		S [2:48]	○○○○●○○○○○○	42
	Reading	P [5/6]	○●○○○○○○○○○	22
B Level 4 / KS 4 [FL4]	Reading	S [2:48]	○○●○○○○○○○○	17

How are your tests priced?

We believe in transparent pricing and have three pricing tiers based on the number of learners you wish to test simultaneously. If you only want to test a small number of learners we have pay-as-you-go versions priced at £495. If you want to test around 25 learners at a time a medium-scale site licence is £1,495 and if you want to test unlimited numbers simultaneously, across multiple sites, a large-scale site licence is £2,495. The large-scale option also includes an onsite installation visit and training for staff who manage the testing process. Compared with other vendors we feel our tests offer great value for money.

Can I use your results as justification for additional funding?

Yes. Our tests tell you where a learners performance falls in relation to both national standards and local groups for all current levels. Most colleges select a Level 2 norm group for their initial comparison when producing group reports across courses. This gives them an initial snapshot of the abilities of learners on the course, tutor group or support programme. They fine tune this for individual reports detailing the exact level to make the case for additional support. Remember our assessment materials are based around best test construction practice where questions have been extensively field trialled. Our reports do not simply list a percentage, grade letter, or number correct but offer far more detail based on rigorous statistical analysis and proven metrics.

What formats of report are there?

Over the years based on requests from members of staff we have added numerous additional individual and group reports. Because reports are generated on-the-fly from the same raw data you are free to choose the format of report you are most comfortable with. This might be a traditional moving bar style report through to RAG traffic light alerting. The choice is yours.

Can I do group reports across courses, tutor groups or other groups I choose?

Yes. Each time you produce a group report you select a grouping code. When the report is produced any learners who are associated with that code will be listed. Generally learners are assigned to courses, or grouping codes, when you import lists of enrolments from MIS. However you are free to manually assign learners to any codes you wish. You can also do complex assignments if you want, e.g. to put all students doing STEM subjects onto a new STEM code so you could produce a report across this larger STEM group.

What if learners aren't registered in our MIS system?

It's possible that not all learners will be registered when you need to test them. To solve this all our tests can make use of kiosk mode. Learners simply enter their name and date of birth and choose their primary course from a drop down to be tested. As a result you are free to test on an ad hoc basis at anytime throughout the year.

Can I export into Microsoft Excel for further analysis?

Yes. You can export any data you wish and into any format. This is done by defining a template though which you "squeeze" the data. We have provided templates for group and individual reports. For example, to produce a college wide export into Excel you would choose a template, assign everyone to a college wide grouping code and then produce a group export report which you could then open in Excel. Finally you could sort by various columns so that the weakest learners were shown first.

Your tests and reports look good but how easy is your software to use?

Part of our specialisation as Psychologists is in HCI (Human Computer Interaction) and inter-face design. So we'd like to think our software is well designed and easy to use. All our tests use the same reporting and management shell for consistency. Most staff can pick it up very quickly. We also realise people don't often have time to read manuals and so have provided "Help… How do I?" menus which play videos for each common task staff need to carry out. That's not to say we don't have great printed documentation with lots of worked examples!

What should I ask other vendors?

We like to be challenged on our rationale and think you should ask other vendors some tough questions. If they can't answer them succinctly then you should consider whether their initial assessment materials are necessarily as good as they look. One stock answer to look out for is, "We're experts in the sector and I'm telling you questions are at that level so if students answer them correctly then they are at that level".

Here are five key questions to ask of us and other vendors. We're more than happy to answer them:

- How do you know your questions are assessing the correct ability?
- How do you know your questions are at the right level?
- How can you make a decision about a learners ability with only a few questions?
- How long does your test take for each ability level?
- How is your test reliable, valid and accurate? Do you know what these terms mean?