

Case Study : Overcoming English and Maths Anxiety

We spoke to Nikki Wilson, a Peer Worker from Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust about her experience of undertaking English and Maths Functional skills

I first discovered peer support whilst enrolled at the Nottingham Recovery College, and instantly knew it was something I wanted to get involved in. I love being able to 'fly the flag' for peer support and those with lived experience of mental health challenges. It's an exciting time to be part of a gradual shift in culture, where the service-user is being seen as the 'expert' in their own recovery. The fundamental principles of lived experience, the use of strengths-based language and the core skill of active listening, along with showing our vulnerability is being used in a unique way to ensure service-users feel validated and heard and offering hope that personal recovery is possible.

“When I heard about the Peer Worker Apprenticeship, I jumped at the chance to develop my role further. The realisation that I would potentially need to re-take my Maths and English, brought lots of memories flooding back about not being good enough and filled me with self-doubt”

I never enjoyed learning as a teenager; I recall my teens and school years in general being a difficult time where I struggled to engage in learning and didn't feel like I 'fitted in'. However, since that time, I have found coping techniques and strategies which helped me progress in previous roles and allowed me to enjoy learning again. So, I gave myself a good talking to and decided to enrol!

The enrolment process for the functional skills was relatively easy to navigate. The Apprenticeship Programme Lead at Notts HC put me in touch with the course tutors at my local provider, who then provided instructions on how to enrol online as well as being available to answer questions. I was asked to complete assessments for both subjects to allow the tutors to understand ability levels.

“Despite feeling quite overwhelmed on my first day, I quickly realised that all of us in the room were there for the same reason and the anxiety gradually melted away”

I'll be brutally honest; the course is named "intensive" for a reason – 4 weeks is a relatively short period of time to unlock things in my brain that hadn't been used for a very long time!

All learning was face to face, with 1 day a week in a classroom setting and homework set after each session. My personal advice would be to be prepared to put in as much effort as possible over the 4 weeks. I found lots of useful online learning resources such as [Pass Functional Skills | Ofqual Regulated Exams & Courses](#) which provided me with a breakdown of example exam questions and answers, and endless tutorial videos on YouTube which helped to unpick topics I was struggling with (I really wish we'd had these back in the day!). The tutors were really helpful and would often sit with students during the session if they needed additional support. If you need both Maths and English, then another tip would be to do one after the other rather than tackling them both together.

I'm pleased to report that I passed my Level 2 English exam (which really wasn't as daunting as I had thought!). I am sitting my Level 2 Maths exam at the end of this week and although feeling a little less confident, am hopeful that I've done enough to pass. It's worth noting that for those who don't pass first time around, the college have regular re-sits and additional sessions in the run up to the exam.

"I hope that anyone who has those self-doubts or worries about going back into education are reassured by my own experience and feel encouraged to give it a go"