



Steps 4 Life Framework Guide

Preparing for Adulthood

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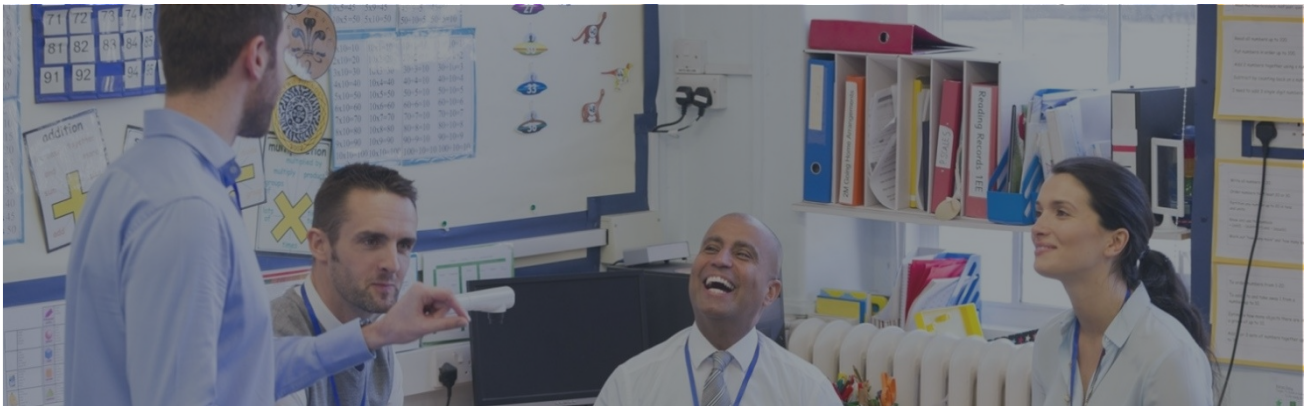


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Background

In England today, young people must stay in education, training, or work with training until **at least their 18th birthday**. And with the **SEND Code of Practice** extending support up to **age 25**, there's now a bigger need than ever for a meaningful curriculum and assessment framework that focuses on **life beyond school**.

At the same time, the number of young people with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) has risen sharply — **up 11% in 2023** according to DfE figures — meaning even more pupils need a curriculum that goes beyond academic learning.

When we spoke to schools and colleges, most said the same thing:

- Around the end of **Key Stage 3**, they shift their curriculum away from a purely National Curriculum focus
- They move towards a more practical curriculum that builds **life skills, employability skills, and independence**
- Some students are on this new pathway for **up to 11 years**, until they turn 25 — far longer than any standard key stage (For comparison, EYFS covers 5 years, Primary covers 6, and Secondary covers 5.)

That's a huge part of a young person's education — and it has a massive impact on their future. But despite this, there are still limited resources available, and very few assessment tools that truly capture the breadth of what students need to learn.

Many settings use accreditation like **ASDAN, King's Trust, AQA, SQA, OCR**, and others to recognise achievement — but these qualifications often only cover a small part of what learners are actually working on. Accreditation is valuable, but it's not the whole story.

Steps 4 Life was developed to fill that gap.

It provides a **broad, flexible assessment framework** that covers the full range of skills pupils need for life after education — not just independence at home, but success in work, relationships, and the wider community.

The framework covers:

- **Academic skills** like English, Maths, and Digital Skills
- **Life skills** like self-care, travel, cooking, and managing money
- **Personal development** including physical and mental wellbeing, citizenship, and relationships
- **Employability skills** — choosing, getting, and thriving in a job

Steps 4 Life gives schools a way to **plan, track, and celebrate** progress in all these areas — helping pupils build the skills and confidence they need for a successful future.

Introducing the Steps 4 Life Framework

Steps 4 Life is designed to give schools and settings a broad, flexible assessment framework to support pupils in developing the skills they need for adulthood.

Some pupils will be working towards fully independent living and employment. Others may be working towards semi-independent living or will require ongoing supported living arrangements.

Because pupils can use this framework over a long period — up to **11 years or more** — it's essential that the assessment system shows meaningful progress over time, in line with EHCP processes.

Steps 4 Life allows professionals to track how pupils develop existing skills, learn new ones, and apply skills across different contexts.

For example, a pupil may first learn to tell the time during Maths lessons. Later, that same skill might be used to manage daily routines, plan journeys, arrive for work placements, or arrange social activities. Some individuals generalise skills easily, while others need more structured support and repetition to transfer skills into everyday life.

The framework is primarily aimed at pupils aged **14 to 25** with **EHCPs** who are in education settings. However, it can also be used with:

- **Students with SEND** working towards GCSEs or qualifications who also need life skills support
- **Students in Alternative Provisions** following practical or vocational pathways
- **Younger pupils** to promote early independence and life skills
- **Individuals in care settings** who may be preparing for semi-independent or independent living

Steps 4 Life is not just about life at home — it's about preparing young people for the **whole of adult life**: living, learning, working, and participating in their communities. It is about giving them the skills to be able to enjoy their future life.

Developmental Range

Steps 4 Life is designed to support a wide developmental range, making it suitable for a broad variety of learners with SEND.

The framework starts at a very **low developmental level**, covering skills typically seen from **birth onwards**, and progresses through to skills equivalent to **Functional Skills Level 2** across all areas. This allows schools and settings to support learners from the earliest stages of development right through to the more advanced skills needed for independent living, employment, and participation in society.

Because of this wide range, **Steps 4 Life** can be used with:

- Learners who are developing early foundational skills such as communication, basic self-care, and early social interaction
- Learners building functional academic skills in English, maths, and digital skills aligned with Entry Level and Level 1–2 standards
- Learners working on life skills, employability skills, and personal development as they prepare for adulthood
- Pupils who may follow a semi-formal or informal curriculum pathway, as well as those on more formal pathways but needing targeted support around independence

This flexibility means the framework can be used across a wide range of settings, including special schools, mainstream schools with specialist support, alternative provisions, and post-16 providers. It also allows teachers and professionals to tailor assessment and curriculum planning to the **individual's current developmental stage**, not just their chronological age.

Steps 4 Life ensures that progress is recognised at every stage, no matter how small the steps — helping every learner move towards greater independence, confidence, and life success.

Supporting All 4 Broad Areas of Need

For many pupils, using a skill in a real-world situation can be much harder than simply learning the skill itself — often because of their wider individual needs.

Steps 4 Life focuses mainly on the **Cognition and Learning** area of need, helping pupils develop practical life, academic, and employability skills. But we know that independence isn't just about learning tasks — it's also about **communication**, **emotional wellbeing**, and **social confidence**.

That's why we've developed our **Communication and Interaction** and **SEMH** frameworks — to help schools assess and support all **four broad areas of need**. By using these frameworks together, settings can build a full profile of a pupil's strengths and needs, and put the right support in place across all areas.

For example, a pupil might know who they should ask for help, but **anxiety** could prevent them from doing it in practice. Or a pupil might have the communication skills to join a conversation, but need support to manage the **emotional** demands of social interaction.

To prepare pupils for adulthood successfully, we need to support their development across **all four broad areas of need**, not just one.

Framework Structure

Steps 4 Life is designed to sit alongside the other frameworks your school already uses to assess Cognition and Learning, Communication and Interaction, and SEMH.

Each of our frameworks has its own levelling structure, carefully built around relevant statutory guidance, qualifications frameworks, or — where appropriate — a structure we have created to best suit the skills being assessed.

For Steps 4 Life, we have aligned the academic skills content with the Functional Skills qualifications, covering Entry Levels 1, 2 and 3, and Levels 1 and 2. This ensures that skills are relevant, recognised, and prepare pupils for real-world success beyond school.

Many pupils will transition onto Steps 4 Life after working within other frameworks such as Engagement Steps or Progression Steps. When they do, any skills they have already achieved that also appear in Steps 4 Life will automatically be transferred across. This avoids duplication, celebrates the learning pupils have already secured, and gives a clear picture of how they are continuing to build on their existing knowledge and abilities.

The image on the next page shows how Steps 4 Life fits alongside our other frameworks and how developmental progress is supported across different pathways.

Framework Comparison Chart

B SQUARED STANDARD SCORE	B SQUARED ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORKS								P LEVELS AND NC LEVELS (COMPARISON)
	Early Steps (2022)	Engagement Steps	Progression Steps & Preparing for Adulthood	Primary Steps	Steps 4 Life	Autism Progress	SEMH	Communi- cation & Interaction	
15 - 15.5									NC 7
14 - 15			Progression Step 10				SEMH Step 11	Level 16	
13 - 14					Level 2	Level 17			NC 6
12 - 13			Progression Step 9	Greater Depth & Breadth			SEMH Step 10	Level 15	NC 5
11 - 12						Level 16			
10 - 11			Progression Step 8	Year 6	Level 1	Level 15	SEMH Step 9	Level 14	NC 4
9 - 10				Year 5					NC 3
8 - 9			Progression Step 7	Year 4	Entry 3	Level 14	SEMH Step 8	Level 13	
7 - 8				Year 3					NC 2a
6 - 7			Progression Step 6 (PKS 6)	Year 2	Entry 2	Level 13	SEMH Step 7	Level 12	NC 2c
5 - 6			Progression Step 5 (PKS 5)						NC 1a
			Progression Step 4 (PKS 4)	Year 1	Entry 1	Level 12	SEMH Step 6	Level 11	NC 1b
4 - 5	Early Learning Goals (ELG)		Progression Step 3 (PKS 3)	Primary Step 3	Step 7	Level 11	SEMH Step 5	Level 10	NC 1c
3 - 4	Children in Reception		Progression Step 2 (PKS 2)	Primary Step 2		Level 10	SEMH Step 4	Level 9	P8
2 - 3	3 & 4 year olds								P7
	2½–3 years	Engagement Step 6			Step 6	Level 9	SEMH Step 3	Level 8	P6
	2–2½ years		Progression Step 1 (PKS 1)	Primary Step 1		Level 8		Level 7	P5
1 - 2	18–24 months	Engagement Step 5			Step 5	Level 7	SEMH Step 2	Level 6	P4
	12–18 months					Level 6		Level 5	P3(ii)
0 - 1	9–12 months	Engagement Step 4			Step 4	Level 5	SEMH Step 1	Level 4	P3(i)
	6–9 months					Level 4		Level 3	P2(ii)
	3–6 months	Engagement Step 3			Step 3	Level 3		Level 2	P2(i)
	0–3 months	Engagement Step 2			Step 2	Level 2		Level 1	P1(ii)
		Engagement Step 1			Step 1	Level 1			P1(i)

Areas Covered by the Steps 4 Life Framework

Our **Steps 4 Life** framework is designed to help staff assess and support a wide range of skills that prepare pupils for adulthood. It covers not independent living skills, employability skills and core academic skills that are essential for leading a fulfilling and independent life.

By breaking these important areas down into clear, manageable steps, the framework makes it easier to spot where support is needed, celebrate progress, and guide pupils towards greater independence, success, and confidence in the future. It focuses on the following areas:

Academic Skills

Steps 4 Life includes a strong focus on **academic skills** because English, maths, digital skills, and personal and social development are all essential for everyday life and employability. Study programmes should always include English and maths at an appropriate level for each learner — all young people need these core skills to succeed.

The **Academic Skills** assessment frameworks cover:

- **English** – practical communication skills for everyday life, focusing on English language use rather than English literature
- **Mathematics** – real-world maths skills for problem solving, reasoning, and practical application of maths and statistics
- **Digital Skills** – everyday digital competence, including communicating, creating, editing, using devices, transacting online, and staying safe
- **Personal and Social Development (PSD)** – applied social skills, supporting physical and mental health, relationships, citizenship, and preparing for adulthood

The academic content within Steps 4 Life is built around key national guidance and frameworks:

- **English** and **maths** content is based on the **Functional Skills qualifications**, covering **Entry Levels 1, 2 and 3**, and **Levels 1 and 2**.
- **Digital Skills** content is based on the **Essential Digital Skills framework** released in 2019.
- **Personal and Social Development (PSD)** content reflects the latest **DfE guidance on Health and Wellbeing, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE)**, and **Citizenship**.

Life Skills

A major focus of post-14 provision for learners with SEND is supporting them to develop the personal and practical skills they'll need in adult life. Future living arrangements will vary widely — from fully supported residential care to semi-independent accommodation, to fully independent living.

Whatever the setting, learners should be encouraged to take on as many responsibilities as possible, building their independence and confidence over time.

Steps 4 Life provides a structured way to assess and support life skills, ensuring learners can work towards the highest level of independence they can manage.

The **Life Skills** assessment frameworks cover:

- **Food** – preparing meals and snacks, using kitchen appliances and utensils safely, understanding hygiene and nutrition
- **Self-Care** – managing and monitoring health, caring for clothing, washing and bathing, and managing toilet needs
- **Travel** – planning and undertaking journeys safely, and navigating different environments
- **Independence** – managing money, routines, living spaces, social activities, leisure time, and participating in the wider community

Life Skills is a Big Area!

When you first open the **Life Skills** pack within Steps 4 Life, it can feel a little daunting — and that's completely normal.

There's a huge amount of content, because life itself is full of complexity, choice, and constant change. Here's what to keep in mind:

- **Life is broad and varied:** When we started building Steps 4 Life, we realised just how many essential skills and pieces of knowledge we take for granted. Life isn't just about surviving — it's about participating, enjoying, and thriving.
- **The developmental range is massive:** Skills start from very early developmental responses — like reacting to sudden movement — and progress to more advanced, real-world abilities like understanding your legal rights when travelling if plans are disrupted.
(And yes, that's all the way from Step 1 through to Level 2, linked to Functional Skills standards!)
- **You don't have to cover everything:** Choose the areas that are relevant to the individuals you're working with. The framework may also highlight areas that you haven't considered yet, helping you build a broader, richer curriculum.
- **Progress takes time:** Many pupils will be working on these skills for years. That's expected. The aim is to support steady development towards greater independence and a positive adult life.
- **It's about living well, not just getting by:** We've included areas often missed in traditional government guidance — like leisure activities, socialising, online gaming, and using community facilities. These skills are vital for promoting lifelong positive mental health, belonging, and happiness.

- **The world is changing fast:** In some areas, you still buy a paper bus ticket. In others, travel is entirely digital. Pupils need to understand mobile payments, online subscriptions, micro-transactions, recognising fake news, and digital citizenship — because these are everyday parts of modern life.
- **Technology is opening up new worlds:** Travel is cheaper and easier. Online communities are more accessible. Technology can remove many of the barriers faced by people with disabilities, helping them participate fully in the world around them — or in digital worlds where their disability doesn't define them. Pupils need to know these communities exist and how they can access and navigate them safely.

Employability Skills

Many learners with SEND will go on to gain purposeful occupation and contribute meaningfully to their communities. Supporting learners to identify their strengths, understand the world of work, and build the skills they need for employment is a vital part of preparing them for adulthood.

The **Employability Skills** content helps pupils develop work-related skills, explore job options, and understand their rights and responsibilities as employees. It also supports schools in integrating **work experience** into study programmes — whether that's through work placements, social action projects, or shorter work tasters — helping learners develop the behaviours and attitudes expected in the workplace.

The **Employability Skills** assessment framework covers:

- **Employment** – universal work-related skills including identifying and gaining appropriate employment, leadership, interpersonal skills, personal organisation, and understanding workplace rights

Framework Content Packs

The framework is purchased as 3 packs, the academic skills pack, life skills pack and employability skills pack. By breaking these key areas down into clear, manageable steps, the framework makes it easier to spot where support is needed, celebrate progress, and guide pupils towards greater independence, success, and confidence in the future. These packs cover on the following areas:

Academic Skills Pack

- English
 - Reading
 - Writing
 - Speaking, Listening & Communicating
 - Reading & Spelling Appendix
- Mathematics
 - Using Numbers & the Number System
 - Using Common Measures, Shape & Space
 - Handling Information & Data
- Digital Skills
 - Communicating
 - Creating & Editing
 - Transacting
 - Using Devices & Handling Information
- Personal & Social Development
 - Citizenship
 - Physical Health & Mental Wellbeing
 - Relationships & Sex Education

Life Skills Pack

- Independence
 - Chores, Routines & Maintenance
 - Entertainment, Leisure & Recreation
 - Managing Money
 - News & Current Events
- Preparing Food
 - Hygiene, Health & Safety
 - Preparing Meals, Snacks & Drinks
 - Nutrition
 - Using Utensils & Appliances
- Self-Care
 - Managing Toilet Needs
 - Managing & Monitoring Health
 - Managing Clothing Needs
 - Washing & Bathing
- Travel
 - Moving Around
 - Planning a Journey
 - Undertaking a Journey

Employability Skills Pack

- Employability
 - Choosing a Job
 - Getting a Job
 - Know Your Rights
 - Workplace Routines
 - Workplace Skills

Using the Steps 4 Life Framework with Evisense

The Steps 4 Life framework works seamlessly with our evidence platform, Evisense. Evisense is simple to use, with a social media-style interface that makes uploading and sharing evidence quick and easy for everyone involved.

Because Evisense allows unlimited users, you can give access to teachers, support staff, therapists, and parents or carers at no extra cost. This helps create a complete, joined-up picture of each pupil's development — across school, home, and wider settings.

Many of the skills in Steps 4 Life are very practical: cooking a meal, managing money, planning a journey, participating in a work placement, and more. Capturing these skills through photos and short videos is key to showing real-world progress that isn't always obvious through written descriptions alone.

Evisense makes it easy to:

- Record a pupil preparing food safely, using public transport, or practising workplace routines
- Share these moments with families and other professionals to celebrate progress and spot areas where extra support is needed
- Encourage parents and carers to upload their own evidence of skills being used at home or in the community

In reality, face-to-face meetings with families and external professionals can be difficult — especially for pupils who travel independently, attend college placements, or who are balancing work experience with school.

Evisense helps overcome these challenges. Staff and parents can quickly upload updates, successes, or challenges, using photos, videos, and comments. This creates a more holistic view of the pupil's development across all areas of life, helping settings provide more personalised, meaningful support as pupils prepare for adulthood.

Using Steps 4 Life with Our Other Frameworks

The **Steps 4 Life** framework is designed to work seamlessly alongside our other assessment frameworks, helping to create a smooth pathway for pupils as they move towards adulthood and independence.

When we created Steps 4 Life, we carefully included appropriate content from existing frameworks like **Progression Steps** to ensure skills are linked and learning continues naturally.

This brings several benefits:

- **Pre-populated skills:** When a pupil moves onto Steps 4 Life, any skills they have already achieved in previous frameworks will automatically be carried across.
- **Skills syncing:** As pupils achieve skills within Steps 4 Life, these updates will sync with other relevant frameworks – and vice versa. Many skills are cross-curricular, so they may appear under multiple areas, reflecting the real-world links between academic, life, and employability skills.
- **Evidence sharing:** Any evidence or comments linked to shared skills will sync across frameworks, allowing teachers and other professionals to easily view and contribute to a pupil's journey.

This approach creates a **more holistic view** of each pupil's progress and achievements — with every professional able to view development through their own lens, whether that's academic, functional, or focused on independence.

Connecting Steps: Simple, Powerful Assessment

All of our frameworks — including Autism Progress — are delivered through **Connecting Steps**, our intuitive online assessment system. Connecting Steps is designed to be **simple to use**, even for staff who are new to assessment or not that tech savvy.

The system uses a clear, user-friendly layout with simple navigation, making it quick to record what a pupil has achieved, and see the next steps.

Teachers, support staff, therapists, and senior leaders can all access the information they need without complex training — Connecting Steps does the hard work behind the scenes, letting you focus on supporting pupils rather than battling software.

Showing Progress in Different Ways

Connecting Steps doesn't just record a single measure of success — it shows **progress in a variety of ways**, helping you see the bigger picture for each pupil. The system tracks:

- **Small steps of progress** — even where full achievement hasn't yet been reached
- **Depth of learning** — If they are working towards achieving a skill, they may have just encountered it, they need physical support or just prompting. If they have achieved the skill, how confident are they and can they apply those skills in different ways?
- **Lateral progress** — showing where pupils are broadening and strengthening their skills within or across different areas
- **Non-linear progress** — recognising that progress is spikey and uneven. Spikes in development can be celebrated, skills that might otherwise be missed.

Whether you're tracking academic milestones, social development, life skills, or communication needs, Connecting Steps gives you the tools to show how every pupil is growing — even when that growth doesn't fit a straight line.

It ensures that **all progress is visible**, celebrated, and used to inform next steps in a meaningful way.

For more information about Connecting Steps or any of our frameworks, please visit the link below, to book a FREE online meeting at a time that works for you.

www.bsquared.co.uk/meeting