

# 'Functional' skills – Your questions answered

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## **What are 'functional' skills?**

**The 14–19 and Skills White Papers in England announced the introduction of new 'functional' English, mathematics and ICT qualifications for young people and adults.**

'Functional' skills are practical skills in English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) that allow individuals to operate confidently, effectively and independently in life.

## **Why are we introducing them?**

Employers and educators have identified these skills as vital for enabling young people and adults to have the practical skills to succeed in further learning, employment and life in modern society.

## **What are the benefits of 'functional' skills?**

- For young people and adults – more will develop the practical applied skills needed for success in work, in further learning and in life.
- For employers – the introduction of 'functional' skills will help ensure there are more prospective employees who can practically apply these 'functional' skills in work situations, helping to improve productivity.
- For Higher Education – improved skills in communication, ICT and mathematics will help students entering further and higher education to tackle their areas of study more confidently.

## **Who are 'functional' skills for?**

'Functional' skills are crucial to the personal development of all learners aged 14 and above. By incorporating 'functional' skills into a variety of learning and qualifications and making them available as standalone qualifications, we are ensuring all young people and adults are able to develop these vital skills (as illustrated in the table opposite).

How?	GCSEs	Specialised Diplomas	Apprenticeships	Standalone qualifications
Who?	Young people and adults	Young people and young adults	Young people and young adults	Young people and adults
Where?	Schools and FE colleges	Schools and FE colleges	Workplace and training providers	Schools, FE colleges, workplace and training providers

### When will 'functional' skills be introduced?

Working with a wide range of stakeholders, QCA produced and consulted on a draft set of standards for 'functional' skills for people aged 14 (KS4) onwards. Standards are technical documents which define and differentiate the skill requirements of a qualification. The standards and approaches to assessing the 'functional' skills are now being trialled until March 2007.

A two-year pilot of 'functional' skills qualifications will take place from September 2007. The final qualifications in English and ICT will be introduced for first teaching in 2009 and in mathematics in 2010.

### How do 'functional' skills build on developments pre-14?

'Functional' skills will build on the success of government strategies to improve performance in these vital skills pre-14. These include:

- Our literacy and numeracy strategies that are equipping more primary school children with the basics – how to read, write and do sums.
- Our Key Stage 3 Strategy that already prepares learners by building on the basics gained through the primary phase. Now we are doing more still – the KS3 reforms will provide extra flexibility, so learners who need extra time or support can catch up in English and mathematics and be ready for the GCSE stage.

### **How will 'functional' skills contribute to the adult skills agenda?**

The development of 'functional' skills for adults is crucial to tackling the skills gap in England. Helping adults improve their levels of 'functional' English, mathematics and ICT will support employers' needs to have a workforce that is enterprising, productive and equipped to compete in business. These skills will also assist adults to interact confidently within their communities.

### **Are 'functional' skills an England-only initiative?**

We are working closely with colleagues in Wales and Northern Ireland. They have an interest in both the GCSE and adult developments, as awarding bodies offer their qualifications across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Wales will also be exploring alternative approaches to the embedding of these fundamental basics in qualifications and other learning outcomes and contributing their experience to the trials evaluation.

### **How will schools, colleges and other providers be helped to introduce 'functional' skills?**

The workforce development implications for this reform are significant. The National Secondary Strategy and the Quality Improvement Agency have been commissioned to provide a joint programme of support, including teaching and learning resources and continuous professional development to ensure 'functional' skills are delivered effectively. This will build on best practice examples from the Key Skills Support Programme, *Skills for Life* Quality Initiative and other support programmes. Resources will be available in the summer, 2007.

### **How are awarding bodies being involved in the design, trials and piloting?**

Awarding bodies have been consulted over the draft standards and will lead the initial trials exploring assessment methods (15 awarding bodies will be involved). Awarding bodies will also lead the certificated pilots, which will take place from September 2007.

### **What will the assessment approach be for 'functional' skills?**

The assessment approach for 'functional' skills will be determined through careful trialling and piloting. A range of assessment approaches (test, task and portfolio) will be developed by awarding bodies and evaluated through the trials and pilots. Awarding bodies are exploring a range of new and innovative methods for the assessment of these applied skills, including electronic and on-screen approaches.

### **Will 'functional' skills replace the Key Skills and *Skills for Life* qualifications?**

We expect this to be the case in respect of the 'main' key skills (Communication, Application of Number, ICT) and *Skills for Life* (Literacy and Numeracy) awards. QCA will keep these qualifications, which form building blocks for the development of the 'functional' skills qualifications, until at least August 2010. This will allow certification up until August 2012. Key skills qualifications above Level 2 (5 GCSEs at A\*-C or equivalent) may remain.

### **Where can I find more information?**

More information on 'functional' skills and our 14-19 reform programme is available at [www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19)

The QCA website at [www.qca.org.uk/functionalskills](http://www.qca.org.uk/functionalskills) is updated regularly and includes information about the trialling of assessment options and the piloting of the qualifications.

# How will learners use their 'functional' skills?

**The examples below have been developed to help people understand how learners will benefit from achieving their 'functional' skills qualifications. They demonstrate how learners can apply 'functional' skills in real-life situations.**

## **'Functional' skills: English – Level 1** **Utilising these skills:**

A student moving to a new flat is able to contact and inform the bank of a change of address appropriately either in person, over the telephone, or in writing.

Having prepared in advance, an administrator in an insurance company is able to benefit from a meeting with her line manager about general performance. She is able to identify and articulate her personal strengths and areas where she needs more support. She has read the company's human resources information board and identified training courses that are available that will help her to progress in her role. She shares the details of these with her manager, who agrees that she should book onto the courses.

## **'Functional' skills: English – Level 2** **Utilising these skills:**

As part of a classroom project a student is able to assemble a range of evidence supporting a point of view from websites and books, to discuss which is relevant and to seek further material, if needed, to form the basis for a report.

Shift workers in a hotel are able to write clear updates in the issues log for the oncoming shifts, recording jobs done, those in progress and requests for action. These are brief, accurate and precise in order for the next shift to act upon them effectively.

## **'Functional' skills: mathematics – Level 1** **Utilising these skills:**

A retail worker is able to calculate in their head the approximate value of the goods a customer has bought and use this understanding to identify discrepancies and to check that totals generated by a cash register, or scanner, are correct.

A member of a reprographics team is able to look at statistics and graphs detailing paper usage and identify trends that might suggest that equipment requires servicing.

A couple reviewing their utility bills are able to calculate their average electricity usage, with seasonal variation, and predict and plan general expenditure over time, minimising financial pressures and personal stress.

### **'Functional' skills: mathematics – Level 2**

#### **Utilising these skills:**

A student planning her transition to further or higher education is able to research and make informed judgements about various banking products available. Reviewing competitive packages, including joining offers, different interest rates, financial charges and savings benefits, the student is able to calculate the most suitable, best value product for their lifestyle. Tailoring personal banking to meet their needs, the student can begin to experience the excitement of being a self-determining young adult.

A contract builder is able to plan for the week ahead before purchasing the supplies he will need for various tasks. He measures the area of the bathroom he needs to tile, as well as the size of the tiles his client has chosen. From these figures he is able to calculate the total surface area and the approximate number of tiles he will need to complete the job. Examining the recommended materials for the adhesive and grouting, he is also able to calculate the quantity required per tile to establish all the products he will need to purchase at the hardware store.

### **'Functional' skills: ICT – Level 1**

#### **Utilising these skills:**

An individual is able to complete transactions such as shopping for groceries and other items online and arrange home delivery.

A family moving to a new area is able to find information online on health, social services and local facilities.

An employee is able to respond appropriately to e-mail messages from colleagues and use e-mail to contact suppliers and customers.

### **'Functional' skills: ICT – Level 2**

#### **Utilising these skills:**

Learners are able to create and use a simple questionnaire to obtain views on healthy eating and input the data into a spreadsheet. They can analyse the information, create representative charts and compose a presentation on their findings for a science class.

A self-employed boiler service engineer is able to set up a database of customers, with names, addresses and job details, so that a mailing can be sent to remind clients of boiler maintenance and to ensure that all jobs undertaken are accurately recorded.

## What is the timetable for developing and introducing 'functional' skills?

The chart below sets out the major milestones.

Future updates will keep you in touch with overall progress.

Date	'Functional' skills milestones
<b>2006</b>	
October	Limited initial trials of assessment options and standards begin, led by awarding bodies.
<b>2007</b>	
September	Two-year pilots of 'functional' English and ICT in GCSE and other contexts (including standalone) begin.
	Three-year pilot of 'functional' mathematics in GCSE and other contexts (including standalone) begin.
	Prospective specialised Diploma centres will join "functional" skills pilot (as set out in the Diploma Gateway Guidance).
<b>2008</b>	
September	Specifications for 'functional' English and ICT standalone qualifications and for English and ICT GCSEs (incorporating 'functional' skills) issued to schools, colleges, work-based and adult providers.
	All three 'functional' skills piloted in first five Diploma lines.
<b>2009</b>	
September	'Functional' English and ICT available nationally.
	Specifications for 'functional' mathematics standalone qualifications and reformed GCSEs (incorporating 'functional' skills) issued to schools, colleges, work-based and adult providers.
<b>2010</b>	
September	'Functional' mathematics and reformed GCSEs available nationally.
<b>2011</b>	
August	Results published for first GCSE cohort taking 'functional' English and ICT within their GCSE programmes.
<b>2012</b>	
August	Results published for first GCSE cohort taking 'functional' English, mathematics and ICT within their GCSE programmes.
September	16-year-olds with 'functional' English, mathematics and ICT proceed to further learning or enter the workforce.



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