

FUNCTIONAL SKILLS QUALIFICATIONS – Frequently Asked Questions

Question: What does it mean when I read that Functional Skills Qualifications have been “reformed”?

Answer: The DfE and Ofqual have been through a process over the last few years of reviewing and revising Functional Skills Qualifications in English and Mathematics. This includes new subject content that has to be taught, new requirements for assessment and a more rigorous approach to assessments.

This reform has been done to ensure that Functional Skills Qualifications in English and Mathematics are fit-for-purpose for both employers and the workplace environment, allowing progression on to GCSE (9-1) Mathematics, or their equivalent qualifications, more effectively.

Access to the DfE subject content and Ofqual conditions and guidance are available through the FutureQuals website and are comprehensively covered in the new Qualification Specifications and Sample Assessment Materials.

Question: What are the biggest changes that I should be aware of for the reformed Functional Skills Qualifications?

Answer: English, Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar (SPaG) are explicitly assessed in the writing assessments at both Level 1 and Level 2. SPaG is worth approximately 40% of the total marks for the writing assessment. Learners will not have access to a dictionary or online spell check software during these assessments.

For Mathematics, there is a new non-calculator section (Section A) in the assessment. Learners will not be permitted to use a calculator for this section. The onscreen calculator will be disabled for this section of the assessment. When learners move onto Section B, they are permitted to use a calculator and the onscreen calculator will be enabled for use. The non-calculator section is worth 25% of the total qualification.

In Mathematics, questions will target either problem-solving skills or underpinning skills. Underpinning skills are defined as the ability to do mathematics when not as part of a problem.

Question: Has the grading for reformed Functional Skills Qualifications in English and Mathematics changed?

Answer: No, learners will still be graded as 'Pass' or 'Fail'. If a learner fails an assessment, they will have the opportunity to resit it.

Question: What has changed about Speaking, Listening and Communication (SLC)?

Answer: Firstly, the name of this component has changed slightly to Speaking, Listening and Communicating!

This component is still internally assessed and externally moderated by FutureQuals. There will be a new bank of scenarios for centres to use for the SLC discussions. These have been designed to be appropriate for the workplace and to allow learners to demonstrate their skills effectively.

If a centre wants to devise their own SLC assessment task, then they must complete and submit their proposal, detailing how it meets all the subject and assessment criteria to FutureQuals in advance of the assessment taking place. FutureQuals will approve centre-devised tasks and provide feedback.

There is a new Record of Learner Achievement form for assessors to complete and submit to evidence learners' achievement. The recording of the outcome of the SLC assessment in XAMS remains unchanged.

The group size for undertaking this assessment is at least three, but no more than five. The tutor/assessor must not be part of the group to make up numbers.

At Level 1, learners are required to complete two discussions. They must consistently achieve all assessment criteria to be graded as a pass.

At Level 2, learners are required to complete one presentation (including a Q&A session) and one discussion. They must consistently achieve all assessment criteria to be graded as a pass.

Question: Has the assessment time for English and Mathematics changed?

Answer: The assessment time for English Reading and Writing assessments at Levels 1 and 2 are now one hour. The total number of marks available for Reading is 30 marks. The total number of marks available for writing is 60.

The assessment time for Speaking, Listening and Communicating at both Level 1 and 2 is 30 minutes.

The assessment time for Mathematics assessments at Levels 1 and 2 is two hours. The total number of marks available is 60. There are 15 marks available for the non-calculator section and 45 marks available for the calculator section.

Question: Have the Guided Learning Hours for Functional Skills Qualifications in English and Mathematics changed?

Answer: Yes, the Guided Learning Hours (GLH) have increased from 45 hours to 55 hours. This is a result of both the increased amount of subject content to be covered and also the increased demand of the new content and requirements.

Centres will need to review and revise their teaching strategies to make sure the increase in GLH is accounted for.

Question: Are there any changes to the way centres invigilate external assessments for English and Mathematics?

Answer: Yes. This is due to the increased focus from the regulator on the security of assessments. Learners must be directly supervised by an independent invigilator throughout an online assessment session.

Invigilators must be used during online/onscreen external assessments. Invigilators **must not** be the same Functional Skills tutor (or any other member of staff with a vested interest in the outcome of the assessment) used for the delivery of the relevant Functional Skills course the learner, or group of learners, is undertaking the assessment for.

Question: What difference will there be to the online assessment/XAMS platform?

Answer: Centres and learners should not see any significant difference to the XAMS platform. There will be new features and functionality, particularly for Mathematics, to accommodate new subject content requirements.

The Sample Assessment Materials will be available for learners to sit as a practice or mock assessment, which will allow them the opportunity to become familiar with the platform and the way it works, prior to sitting their live assessment.

Question: Are there any changes to how I register learners for assessment?

Answer: No, centres will see no difference in registering learners for assessment or in claiming certificates. There are new QMIS qualification codes for Functional Skills Qualifications in English and Mathematics. These are:

Level 1 Functional Skills Qualifications in English – L1FSE

Level 2 Functional Skills Qualifications in English – L2FSE

Level 1 Functional Skills Qualifications in Mathematics – L1FSM

Level 2 Functional Skills Qualifications in Mathematics – L2FSM

Question: Are there any changes to how I schedule learners on XAMS?

Answer: No, centres will see no difference in the way they schedule learners for assessment or in claiming certificates.

Question: Are there any changes to the resit assessment windows?

Answer: No, there is no difference or changes in the way resit assessments are registered, scheduled or the period of time allowed between assessments attempts.

Question: Is there a crossover period for learners on the legacy (non-reformed) Functional Skills Qualifications?

Answer: The 'legacy' (i.e. non-reformed Functional Skills Qualifications that centres are currently delivering) will only be available for first registration until the 31 August 2019.

After this date (31 August 2019), no new registrations will be allowed on these qualifications. All learners will be required to be registered on the new Functional Skills Qualifications.

The legacy Functional Skills Qualifications will be available for resits only from 1 September 2019 until the final certification date of 31 August 2020.

After this date (31 August 2020), the legacy Functional Skills Qualifications will be withdrawn and no longer available to centres or learners.

Question: Why is the reform only happening to English and Mathematics? What about ICT?

Answer: English and Mathematics have been the focus for the DfE and Ofqual, and these qualifications will be available for centres to teach from 1st September 2019.

The process to reform Functional Skills ICT began in May 2019, with public consultations on the ICT subject criteria. You may notice that Functional Skills ICT has been renamed to Digital Functional Skills as well. The new Digital Functional Skills Qualifications will be available to centres for teaching from 1st September 2021.

As a result of this, Functional Skills ICT will continue to be delivered, assessed and awarded in its current form, until the launch of the new Digital Functional Skills Qualifications.