

**Ofqual**  
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# Functional Skills qualifications criteria

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November 2009

Ofqual/09/4558

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# Introduction

Functional Skills are the fundamental applied skills in English, information and communication technology (ICT) and mathematics that help people to gain the most from life, learning and work.

Functional Skills qualifications are available in English, ICT and mathematics at Entry 1, Entry 2, Entry 3, level 1 and level 2. Each qualification is separate and assessed independently.

Awarding organisation specifications for Functional Skills qualifications must meet the requirements outlined in the following:

- *'Functional Skills criteria for English, mathematics and ICT'* specifies the skills standards, coverage and range for the qualifications at each level
- regulators' general requirements, including the common criteria for all qualifications as defined in *"The statutory regulation of external qualifications"* (QCA/04/1293).

All awarding organisations offering Functional Skills qualifications must comply with any relevant Ofqual Code of Practice.

# Assessment

1. Assessment must, according to the skill areas:

- provide realistic contexts, scenarios and problems
- specify tasks that are relevant to the context
- require application of knowledge, skills and understanding for a purpose
- require problem solving
- assess process skills and the outcome of their application in different contexts

2. Assessment must be consistent with the levels articulated in the skills standards and the associated coverage and range as specified within the Functional Skills criteria. The level of difficulty for Functional Skills assessment must be determined by the following interacting factors:
  - the complexity of tasks/problems and the contexts in which they are embedded
  - the technical demand of the content that might be applied in these contexts
  - a candidate's level of familiarity with the type of task/problem and context
  - the level of independence required of the candidate.
3. Assessment must be targeted at a specific level and comply with the respective skill standards at that level and not include additional requirements.

## **Assessment design**

4. Assessment must be designed to assess a single level. The assessment must provide a reliable measure of proficiency at the level by providing significant evidence of success against the requirements of the skills criteria at the specified level.
5. Assessment at Entry level contains three sub-levels (Entry 1, Entry 2 and Entry 3). Assessment must be targeted at a specific sub-level and be able to award and certificate at the sub-levels.
6. Assessment can be entirely open response or predominantly open response with some fixed response assessment as specified within the Functional Skills criteria.
7. Open response assessment is defined as task-based assessment based on real-life contexts that require candidates to apply their skills, knowledge and understanding in order to resolve problem/s or produce effective outcome/s. Open response assessment presents purposeful tasks and problems embedded in realistic scenarios but does not prescribe the process/es or method/s by which the candidate responds. The process skills applied to contextualised tasks and problems to achieve successful results and/or effective outcomes are a key focus of this type of assessment. Awarding organisations must ensure that the forms of open response assessment used in Functional Skills qualifications are appropriate at each level.

8. Fixed response assessment is defined as assessment that presents items where the candidate is confined to either a single or limited number of correct responses predetermined by the assessment, and where process is not explicitly credited. In multiple choice assessments, for example, candidates are required to select the correct response/s from a range of options. Other forms of fixed response assessment allow candidates to provide correct response/s without options or distracters being presented. Fixed response assessment must focus on the assessment of understanding and knowledge for a purpose.
9. The Functional Skills criteria for English, mathematics and ICT specify the maximum proportion of fixed response assessment permitted for the assessment of each qualification.
10. Language used within assessment must be straightforward and direct. In assessments other than those relating to Functional Skills English, the language used must be accessible to learners operating at least a level below that of the assessable content. Technical language that is required as part of the essential lexicon of the skill area at the level being assessed is permitted. Functional Skills Entry 1 assessment is targeted at the higher end of the Entry 1 performance spectrum and language used at this level must, as far as possible, be set below this point.
11. In assessments, other than those relating to Functional Skills ICT qualifications, the inclusion of any ICT elements must not interfere with the assessment of the primary skill.
12. In assessments, other than those relating to Functional Skills mathematics qualifications, the inclusion of any mathematical elements must not interfere with the assessment of the primary skill.
13. Where Functional Skills criteria allow, assessment may sample from the coverage and range within the Functional Skills qualifications. Awarding organisations must be able to demonstrate that any sampling of the coverage and range over time does not undermine the qualification as a measure of functionality at the level nor make sampled assessment content predictable. This must be supported by assessment specifications that detail the awarding organisation approach to sampling for each assessment and over time.
14. Assessment specifications and mark schemes must show how the assessments relate to the requirements of the Functional Skills criteria for English, mathematics and ICT.
15. Assessment must be mark based, with the exception of the speaking, listening and communication component in English.

16. Mark allocation and requisite performance evidence must be in line with the assessment weightings and other requirements of the respective Functional Skills criteria. When setting pass marks, awarding organisations must ensure that the pass thresholds take account of these weightings and requirements.
17. Assessment must indicate the level of detail required and display the number of marks available per assessment item/task. Mark schemes must specify the performance evidence that is necessary to display the full range of marks.
18. Awarding organisations must demonstrate that the volume and duration of their assessment, including any pre-release materials, are proportionate to the skills requirements at the specified level.
19. Assessment using pre-release materials must not rely exclusively on that material for the assessment and must ensure that any material provided does not lead to predictable assessments. Awarding organisations must provide clear guidance on the purpose and use of pre-release materials, including details of the reading time that will be provided in the summative assessment.
20. Awarding organisations must provide assessment opportunities that are sufficiently frequent to meet the needs of their candidates.
21. Awarding organisations must state and comply with an appropriate period of time by which they will confirm to centres the outcomes of assessment (ie pass/fail).

## **External and internal assessment**

22. At Entry levels 1, 2 and 3, assessment must be externally specified by the awarding organisation and must be internally marked, except in the case of e-assessment where electronic marking is required. Assessments at the Entry levels can be internally contextualised and/or adapted according to the controlled assessment regulations (see Ofqual's separate Appendix A: *'Controlled assessment regulations for functional skills: Entry 1, Entry 2, Entry 3 in English, mathematics and ICT. English speaking, listening and communication at Entry 1, Entry 2, Entry 3 and level 1 and level 2'*.)
23. At levels 1 and 2, assessment must be externally set by the awarding organisation and externally marked by the awarding organisation, with the exception of Functional Skills English in speaking, listening and communication.

24. The Functional Skills English in speaking, listening and communication assessment must be externally specified at all levels by the awarding organisation but must be internally marked. The assessment of Functional Skills English in speaking, listening and communication can be internally contextualised and/or adapted according to the controlled assessment regulations (see Appendix A, detailed above).
25. At Entry levels 1, 2 and 3 in English, mathematics and ICT and at levels 1 and 2 in speaking, listening and communication, awarding organisations must:
  - provide centres with guidance on the controlled assessment requirements
  - ensure that internal assessment procedures and/or contextualisation does not alter the level of the assessment or contravene the qualification criteria or skills criteria
  - specify in full their assessment verification and other quality assurance procedures.

## **Equality, access and inclusion**

26. Awarding organisations must ensure that their specifications and assessment materials provide fair and equal access in terms of disability, gender, race, age, sexual orientation and religion/belief.
27. Assessments must provide a valid measure of the candidates' ability to meet the qualification requirements in line with their normal ways of working (see Appendix B, for each subject criteria comprising inclusion documents for each of the qualifications, detailing the full range of strategies candidates are permitted to use to meet the requirements of the assessments).
28. Functional Skills qualifications and assessment must be designed to be inclusive and to minimise any later need to make reasonable adjustments or exemptions. Functional Skills qualifications and assessment materials should anticipate the needs of all candidates (see Appendix B for further detail).
29. Awarding organisations must comply with the regulatory access arrangements for the qualifications and make these available to their centres.
30. Where necessary, awarding organisations should make reasonable adjustments so that candidates with disabilities can access assessment. These should ensure that candidates are not given an unfair advantage or disadvantage compared with candidates not using reasonable adjustments, or invalidate the assessment requirements set out in the specification.

31. In Functional Skills English where barriers to access remain, awarding organisations must offer candidates with disabilities, as a last resort, exemptions from individual assessment components within the qualification. This does not apply to Functional Skills mathematics and ICT qualifications, as they are integrated single component qualifications. All candidates must complete some element of assessment and cannot, therefore, be exempt from the entire assessment for a qualification.

## **Certification**

32. Certificates must use the titles '[Awarding organisation name] Functional Skills qualification in [English / mathematics / information and communication technology (ICT)] at [Entry 1, Entry 2, Entry 3, level 1 or level 2]'.
33. Where a candidate's performance is sufficient to meet the level requirements, a Functional Skills qualification pass certificate is awarded. No grades are issued with respect to these qualifications.
34. In Functional Skills English, a formal statement of results must be available to candidates and must report the level at which the qualification has been awarded and the level at which the assessment components have been achieved.
35. Functional Skills qualification certificates must positively report the assessment component/s that has/have been passed to achieve the qualification.

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First published in 2009.

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