

## Reforming Maths and English Functional Skills Qualifications: Questions and Answers

### Q: What are Functional Skills?

A: Functional Skills are qualifications that enable learners to apply their skills in everyday life, and can be contextualised for individual study programmes. They are available in English, maths and ICT. There are five levels from Entry one through to Level 2. The assessment regime is flexible. Awarding organisations offer paper-based assessments, on-line assessments or a mixture of the two. Functional Skills have become the most widely used non-GCSE qualifications. Just over a million certificates were awarded in 2013/14.

### Q: Why are you reforming English and maths Functional Skills? What is wrong with them?

A: The ETF's review 'Making maths and English work for all' found that Functional Skills were not broken, but that work could be done to improve their relevance and content, as well as improve their recognition and credibility in the labour market. The government wants to ensure everyone has an appropriate opportunity to improve their maths and English skills and achieve a credible qualification that employers recognise.

### Q: Does this mean we are moving away from a focus on achieving A\*-C in GCSE maths and English by 19?

A: No. The government supports young people and adults to achieve A\*-C in GCSE maths and English wherever possible. For some learners, this might not be appropriate, for example, in traineeships, where more of an applied focus to English and maths may suit the learner better. Functional Skills offers another route to certify achievement of applied literacy and numeracy skills for life and work.

### Q: How long will the reform take? When will new Functional Skills be taught?

A: We expect this to be a three year programme of reform, starting from October 2015. New Functional Skills qualifications in English and maths will be available in 2018.

### Q: What will the programme of reform involve?

A: The ETF will begin by consulting extensively with employers, practitioners, and other interested parties on the Standards which underpin Functional Skills to ensure the content of the qualifications reflects the English and maths knowledge and skills which employers most value. The ETF will then work with Ofqual to ensure the new Standards are reflected in the assessment regime. There will be support for the workforce to be prepared to teach the updated qualifications. The reform will also address the question of the continuing need for other English and maths qualifications (other than GCSE) in post-19 education.

### Q: Why is ETF leading this programme?

A: Reform to Functional Skills is going to require close consultation with the FE sector and employers, and linking to improvements in the workforce, which ETF are well positioned to do. The ETF has been involved in this work from the start, carrying out the first stage of the review 'Making maths and English work for all', which recommended that Functional Skills were not broken but that improvements could be made. It has strong links with the post-16 education and training sector and employers.

The ETF collects data about the characteristics of the workforce including English and maths teachers and from 2016 will collect information about their qualifications. A programme of continuing professional development to improve the personal skills and teaching approaches of the workforce – through the Maths and English Pipelines - is already underway.

**Q: What role will Functional Skills play in Apprenticeships?**

**A:** Functional Skills will continue to be part of Apprenticeship completion requirements but work is ongoing with Apprenticeship providers to enable them to offer GCSEs to their apprentices where appropriate. From 2014/15, the English and maths requirement for Intermediate (Level 2) Apprenticeships has been stronger, with all apprentices who have already achieved Level 1 English and maths having to work towards Level 2.

**Q: How does this relate to Ofqual's review of Functional Skills?**

**A:** Ofqual's review of Functional Skills in 2014 found that there are some improvements that need to be made by awarding organisations to improve the quality of assessment materials, reduce the risk of malpractice and maladministration, strengthen standard setting procedures and evaluate better how far their qualifications are meeting user needs. Ofqual will be continuing their work in this regard, and will be closely involved with this reform programme.

**Q: Does this mean you're taking forward the recommendation to make maths and English work for all?**

**A:** Yes, we believe that literacy and numeracy are the foundation for all achievement in education and critical for work and everyday life yet we have a long tail of working age adults whose skills are below the level needed to support a highly productive advanced economy. By reforming Functional Skills we hope to strengthen the offer available to young people and adults to achieve those critical skills and improve our literacy and numeracy for the better.

**Q: What about ICT Functional Skills?**

**A:** The focus of this programme is on literacy and numeracy, so ICT Functional Skills have been kept out of scope. However, as part of reforming English and maths Functional Skills, we will want to ensure that students learn to apply their skills in an IT rich environment, which is highly relevant to the modern workplace.

**Q: How can stakeholders engage with the process?**

**A:** The ETF will undertake a wide-ranging consultation and publish the different ways to get involved on its website. To keep in touch with developments and opportunities to participate, sign up to the ETF Newsletter <http://www.et-foundation.co.uk/newsletters/>.

**Q: When will the consultation on the National Literacy and Numeracy Standards be launched?**

**A:** Details of the consultation will be made available on the ETF website, and will be widely publicised through the ETF's networks and digital media.

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