

Reforming Maths and English Functional Skills Qualifications

1. Overview

The Education and Training Foundation is leading a maths and English Functional Skills reform programme that will result in a robust qualification for young people, and adults returning to education, that has credibility with employers. The reformed qualifications will provide opportunities for all learners to improve their skills in a contextualised and flexible way.

*Making maths and English work for all*¹ recommended that Functional Skills are “not broken” but could be improved and the Standards on which they are based need updating. We will use this reform programme to have multiple in-depth discussions with employers and use those findings to recommend improvements to government and revise the National Literacy and Numeracy Standards. It is critically important that we bring employers and the post 16 education and training sector with us on the journey of change so all developments will be consulted on.

Our aim is to reform Functional Skills qualifications in maths and English so they are rigorous, challenging and well-taught.

2. How will the reform programme work?

The first stage of this reform programme will undertake a wide-ranging consultation and produce a report, by the end of August 2016, with policy recommendations for Ministers. All post 16 qualifications in maths and English will be in scope but the focus will be on the breadth of knowledge and skills required for Functional Skills to support learners in life and work. The consultation will cover the current levels of Functional Skills (E1–L2) and the number of guided learning hours needed for learners on technical and vocational programmes of study, including apprenticeships and traineeships, to achieve this new qualification.

This consultation will also result in a revised set of *National Adult Literacy and Numeracy Standards*² to be publically available on the Excellence Gateway from August 2016.

¹ http://www.et-foundation.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Making-maths-and-English-work-for-all-25_03_2015002.pdf

²The Standards provide a detailed specification of the skills and capabilities that comprise each skill, together with descriptors that define the level of performance of each capability.

The next stage of reform will develop new core curricula and updated 'Access for All' to support teaching of the new qualification for all learners, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. We will also produce training materials for those running initial teacher training to include in updated courses and ensure new teachers are trained to teach the newly-reformed Functional Skills qualifications.

We will work closely with awarding organisations and Ofqual to ensure the features of the reformed qualifications are reflected in the teaching and learning support material and to update Functional Skills qualifications based on the new conditions of assessment. In order to support teachers and trainers, we will build on our current programme of continuing professional development. This will ensure teachers of maths and English, including vocational teachers and trainers, are secure in their personal maths and English skills, and trained in focusing on the skills and knowledge valued by employers. It will include effective use of technology in teaching and learning.

3. How will the reform programme be managed?

We will appoint a delivery partner to carry out the initial consultation. The whole reform programme will be overseen by a Working Group, which will ensure consultations are effective and meaningful, and manage diverging opinions to reach consensus. We will set up an Expert Advisory Group to provide independent advice from different perspectives to this group. A Functional Maths and English Reform Board, managed by David Russell, CEO, The Education and Training Foundation will have full accountability for the reform programme, ensure alignment with Ofqual and report directly to Ministers.

4. How will the reform programme be evaluated?

The reform programme will include an independent evaluation. This will make judgements on whether the reform programme meets its objectives and the extent to which reformed Functional Skills qualifications lead to improved levels of skills and understanding, as measured by independent testing. It will also examine the level of recognition and understanding of Functional Skills qualifications by employers, students and the public, as measured through surveys and other sources of information and the effectiveness of the support provided to those teaching reformed Functional Skills qualifications.

5. What is the anticipated impact of the reform programme?

This reform programme should have a positive impact on the current levels of achievement of learners up to and including level 2 and enable all learners to progress in these subjects. The newly-reformed Functional Skills qualification will be valued by employers, young people, adult learners and the teaching profession. It will provide the skills learners need to compete in the labour market, progress to further learning, and contribute to the wider economy.

The sector delivering this qualification is diverse, including adult and community learning providers, independent learning providers, workplace provision, offender learning and general further education. It is critical this reform programme has a positive impact for teachers and learners in all these settings and includes support for learners with special education needs and/or disabilities.

Our proposed impacts are:

- improve attendance in maths and English learning;
- raise standards of maths and English for work and life;
- improve completion rates in Functional Skills;
- improve and expand the use of IT in Functional Skills teaching and reflect the use of IT in work and everyday life;
- support 16-19 age group learners and others where relevant to take the next step and progress to GCSE; and
- align maths and English teaching, learning and assessment with employers' needs.

The Education and Training Foundation
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