



Department
for Education

Subject content consultation for English and Mathematics Functional Skills Qualifications

Government consultation

Launch date 12 September 2017

Respond by 07 November 2017

Contents

Introduction	3
Who this is for	3
Issue date	3
Enquiries	3
Additional copies	4
The response	4
About this consultation	5
Respond online	5
Other ways to respond	5
Deadline	6
Background	7
Proposals for English content	9
Proposals for mathematics content	10
Consultation questions	11

Introduction

The Department for Education is seeking views on proposed subject content for reformed Functional Skills in English and mathematics.

Establishing the content of these reformed qualifications is a critical part of improving Functional Skills so that they can meet the needs of students and employers.

Who this is for

This consultation is for anybody with an interest in the English and mathematics subject content for young people and adults pursuing Functional Skills qualifications. This includes:

- Further Education colleges, adult education providers and independent training providers
- Organisations representing further education teachers
- Subject and sector associations
- Adult students
- Apprentices
- 16-18 year olds
- Employers/business sector
- Teachers
- Parents
- Awarding organisations
- Third sector organisations

Issue date

The consultation was issued on 12 September 2017.

Enquiries

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can contact the team on: fscontent.consultation@education.gov.uk

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website or the consultation process in general, you can contact the DfE Ministerial and Public Communications Division by email: Consultations.Coordinator@education.gov.uk or by telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the [DfE Contact us page](#).

Additional copies

Additional copies are available electronically and can be downloaded from [GOV.UK DfE consultations](#).

The response

The results of the consultation and the Department's response will be [published on GOV.UK](#) once consultation responses have been analysed.

About this consultation

Functional Skills qualifications serve multiple purposes. They provide:

- reliable evidence of a student's achievement against demanding content that is relevant to the workplace;
- assessment of students' underpinning knowledge as well as the ability to apply this in different contexts; and
- a foundation for progression into further study or employment.

The expectations set out in the Functional Skills subject content should meet the needs of employers and prepare students to apply their knowledge and skills in their working and everyday life. The subject content should cover the essential knowledge and understanding for the subject at an appropriate level for each of the levels: Entry Levels 1-3, Level 1 and Level 2.

The subject content has been developed in consultation with a number of key stakeholders including teachers, employers, students, Awarding Organisations, subject-matter experts and education associations. The updated subject content is intended to improve students' underlying skills and knowledge (such as reading, spelling and arithmetic) as well as improving communication skills.

It is anticipated that these changes will be beneficial for the student in order to improve his or her chances of securing a job and progressing within employment or Further Education. It will also be advantageous to future employers by allowing them to benefit from the skills that students will gain through the reformed Functional Skills content.

In responding to this consultation, respondents should refer to the Functional Skills subject content for English and mathematics. These documents can be found via links on the consultation website.

We would like to hear your views on our proposals.

Respond online

To help us analyse the responses please use the online system wherever possible. Visit www.education.gov.uk/consultations to submit your response.

Other ways to respond

If for exceptional reasons, you are unable to use the online system, for example because you use specialist accessibility software that is not compatible with the system, you may download a word document version of the form and email it or post it.

By email

- fscontent.consultation@education.gov.uk

By post

Post 16 Basic Skills Team
Department for Education
2nd Floor, 2 St. Paul's Place
125 Norfolk Street
Sheffield
S1 2FJ

Deadline

The consultation closes on 07 November 2017.

Background

The Government wants to support people to develop and demonstrate the essential skills that they need to get on in life and work. English and mathematics skills and qualifications are a core part of this because of the high returns that these subjects bring for individuals' earnings and employment prospects, productivity in the workplace, and the economy as a whole.

The Government wants to ensure that people of all ages have high-quality and well-regarded qualifications that demonstrate their skills to employers. As a result of their foundational nature, English and mathematics qualifications are particularly important in supporting people to gain and demonstrate skills, to secure a job and progress within employment.

Functional Skills in English and mathematics are an important part of the qualifications available to people in England. They aim to enable students to apply their skills in everyday life and work. There are five separate levels that demonstrate skills at Entry Levels 1-3, Level 1 and Level 2. Particularly popular with apprentices and adult students, Functional Skills have become the most widely used non-GCSE qualifications and over 1 million¹ mathematics and English courses were started in 2015/16.

Since their introduction in 2010, Functional Skills have rapidly gained recognition from employers, giving businesses across the country confidence in the skills of employees with these qualifications. A recent survey conducted on behalf of Ofqual² demonstrated that over 80% of participating employers indicated that they have some understanding of Functional Skills and nearly two-thirds of respondents stated they have a very or quite good understanding of these qualifications.

Building on the early success of Functional Skills, the Government commissioned the Education and Training Foundation to review the effectiveness of these qualifications and recommend how they could be strengthened. The Government has set out to improve the relevance and content of Functional Skills, and build their recognition and credibility in the labour market. These steps will ensure that everyone – regardless of background or previous education opportunities – has the opportunity to obtain high-quality and highly-valued skills and qualifications.

Determining the content of these reformed qualifications is a critical part of improving

¹ [FE data library: further education and skills](#)

² Pye Tait Consulting: Employer Qualification Perceptions Survey (2017) (commissioned by Ofqual): [Pye Tait Consulting: Employer Qualification Perceptions Survey](#)

Functional Skills so that they can meet the needs of students and employers. As a result, from 2015 to 2017, the Government and the Education and Training Foundation engaged widely with further education colleges, practitioners and providers, employers, subject experts and students to develop reformed subject content that will best meet employers' needs and develop the mathematics and literacy skills that people need for life and work.

Proposals for English content

Reformed Functional Skills English qualifications should have clear criteria at different levels, but remain as one suite of qualifications to better facilitate a person's progression. The qualifications should provide assurance that students have retained and consolidated their understanding of subject content covered during earlier levels.

The Entry Level qualifications should ensure that people can demonstrate the ability, at an appropriate level, to read, write, speak, listen and communicate in English, and to apply these skills in familiar situations. They should provide the knowledge and skills needed for progression to further study in English at Levels 1 and 2.

At Levels 1 and 2, Functional Skills English qualifications should ensure people can demonstrate the ability, at an appropriate level, to read, write, speak, listen and communicate in English, and apply these skills effectively to a range of purposes in the workplace and in other real life situations. The content is intended to support progression to employment or to further study.

A number of amendments have been made to the English subject content following engagement with employers, subject-matter experts and other stakeholders. The content now has a greater focus on oral communication and the requirements for spelling, punctuation and grammar have been strengthened. Phonics has been added in order to effectively build reading skills, providing the foundation needed to sound words out in order to read words automatically on sight.

In order to ensure that a student's underpinning skills are being assessed Ofqual is consulting separately on a proposal to test a student's ability to apply their knowledge and skills without the use of spelling and grammar checks, for example electronic aids and dictionaries.

Proposals for mathematics content

The reformed subject content for mathematics has clear criteria at different levels, but again remain as one family of qualifications to best support a student's progression.

Entry Level mathematics should ensure a student demonstrates a sound grasp of the basics of mathematics knowledge and skills at the appropriate level and the ability to apply mathematical thinking to solve simple problems in familiar situations. These qualifications should also provide the knowledge and skills for further study in mathematics at Levels 1 and 2.

At Levels 1 and 2, Functional Skills mathematics qualifications should ensure people can demonstrate a sound grasp of mathematics at the appropriate level and the ability to apply mathematical thinking effectively to solve problems successfully in the workplace and in other real life situations. Responding to the needs of employers, reformed content has a strong focus on contextualising knowledge and skills to improve the relevance for students, for example, calculating percentages based on VAT or calculating simple compound interest. Mathematical literacy is included, as is approximation, estimation and checking.

In order to ensure that a student's underpinning skills are being assessed, Ofqual will require both calculator and non-calculator assessment and is consulting separately on a proposal to introduce weightings for calculator and non-calculator based assessment.

Consultation questions

This consultation asks questions on whether the proposed subject content for Functional Skills represents a demanding course of study for students who will take the qualifications, and whether they develop the numeracy and literacy skills required for employment.

Does the proposed subject content cover the appropriate knowledge and understanding for Functional Skills in these subjects?

At Entry levels: Does the content cover the key elements of literacy and numeracy needed to support students to progress to higher levels of study in English and mathematics?

At Levels 1 and 2: Does the content cover the key elements of literacy and numeracy needed for employment?

At Levels 1 and 2: Will the proposed qualifications secure sound progression for the purposes of progression into further study?

Does the proposed subject content provide assurance that essential knowledge taught in earlier levels is built upon and represented adequately?

In accordance with the Equality Act 2010, Ministers must have “due regard”, when making decisions, to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination; advance equality of opportunity; and foster good relations, in relation to protected characteristics. The Department for Education has been taking this requirement into account in developing draft subject content and assessment objectives.

Do any of the proposals have potential to have a disproportionate impact, positive or negative, on specific student groups, in particular the 'protected characteristic' groups? (The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity); if they have potential for an adverse impact, how can this be reduced?

Whilst responsibility for specifying the subject content of Functional Skills lies with the Department for Education, responsibility for their regulation lies with Ofqual. The regulator will be putting in place new regulatory requirements for reformed Functional Skills. Ofqual's regulatory approach will be designed to provide reliable evidence of a student's achievements against demanding content that is relevant to the workplace; assess a student's underpinning knowledge and their ability to apply this in different contexts; and provide the foundations for progression to further study, or into employment. Ofqual will shortly be consulting on approaches to assessment and

standards in the reformed Functional Skills qualifications; their consultation will be found at the following link [Ofqual consultation](#). Many respondents will want to formulate their views in light of the proposals across both the Department for Education and Ofqual consultations.

Please indicate in your response if you will be responding to both consultations.



Department
for Education

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