

Key skills qualifications

Information relates to 3638 and any qualification packages including access to key skills qualifications

Levels 1 to 4

In this month's *Key skills news*:

- Results processing delays: we're sorry!
- Key skills achievement benchmarking

Key skills news is published every month and contains all the latest information and updates about the key skills qualifications awarded by City & Guilds.

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A full archive of this newsletter is also available on our key skills 'Latest news' page.

Results processing delays: we're sorry!

As you may be aware, we have been experiencing some delays in processing results and certificates for the key skills qualifications in England (3638-01) over the past few weeks. The increased volume of test results and portfolio claims during June and July has caused our processing systems to operate much more slowly than expected. For this we can only apologise.

Since the end of July, we have been giving key skills transactions particular priority, and will continue to do so until the backlog is cleared. At the time of writing, we were expecting to have all delayed results released no later than Friday 22 August.

The problem has particularly affected key skills because of the need to validate test and portfolio achievement for each candidate before a certificate can be generated. We are also working on a major systems upgrade to address these performance issues more permanently and there will be an announcement about this during the autumn.

Key skills news...

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We have alerted the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) national office to this problem; they have advised us that funding can still be claimed after the end of the funding year 31 July 2008. Apprenticeship funding is claimed after the end of the year on ILR (Individualised Learner Records) returns at the end of August, September and October. Other funding models can be claimed until February 2009.

Key skills achievement benchmarking

With the increasing focus on key skills success rates, we are increasingly being asked for benchmark information. Although we are happy to provide what information we can, the nature of these qualifications is such that it is quite difficult for us to measure 'overall success' in any meaningful sense, eg:

- Candidates can attempt the key skills tests at any stage during their programme, and can re-sit any number of times. In some cases, centres have been known to enter candidates for the test right at the beginning of their programme as a form of initial assessment; there is a popular misconception that these are 'end tests' although that is certainly not the case in practice!
- A key skills portfolio cannot be failed – just 'not yet completed'. Candidates may well leave their programme before completing the key skills they were working towards, although as an awarding body we have no way of capturing this information.
- We operate a single point of registration for all 24 key skills qualifications, which means all registered candidates are technically working towards all 24 qualifications. A candidate achieving three key skills could therefore be deemed to have 'failed' the other 21. In practice, the mean number of key skills qualification achievements works out at just over two per candidate.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) publish national key skills attainment data (covering England, Wales and Northern Ireland). The latest figures are available from www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000783/index.shtml.

In addition, we have published pass rate data for the key skills tests taken with City & Guilds on our national tests resource centre (www.cityandguilds.com/sites/basicskills/tests.htm).

More information about our key skills qualifications can be found on this dedicated City & Guilds website: www.key-skills.org

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- Key skills test results – if you're experiencing delays please bear with us
- Level 4 panel review – reminder
- Who can assess/deliver key skills?

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Key skills test results – if you're experiencing delays please bear with us

You may be aware that we have been having a few teething problems with our new examination processing system introduced a few months back with the new Walled Garden. Unfortunately one of the difficulties we've had has affected **some** key skills test results dating from March 2008 (and in a small number of cases even earlier).

Please be assured that we are working to resolve all of these cases as quickly as we can (as well as dealing with the underlying problem), and of course we're very sorry for any inconvenience caused to candidates or yourselves. If you are still waiting on any key skills test results from March or earlier please bear with us. If you haven't already heard from (or been in touch with) our Customer Relations or Data Management team and have overdue results, please drop us a line at keyskills@cityandguilds.com.

Please note that this year's May and June series results are due to be available as follows:

Key skills news...

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May 2008

Test(s)	Results due no later than
Level 1-2 Application of Number	Thursday 12 June 2008
Level 1-2 Communication	Friday 13 June 2008
Level 1-2 ICT	Monday 16 June 2008
Level 3 (AoN/Comm/ICT)	Friday 18 July 2008

June 2008

Test(s)	Results due no later than
Level 1-2 Application of Number	Wednesday 9 July 2008
Level 1-2 Communication	Thursday 10 July 2008
Level 1-2 ICT	Friday 11 July 2008
Level 3-4 (AoN/Comm/ICT)	Friday 8 August 2008

The following may help to eliminate delays or problems with your test results:

1. Ensure that you return **all** of your candidates' Multiple Choice Answer (MA) sheets at the same time, and that these are accompanied by the completed Invigilation Certificate.
2. Please do **not** send in multiple photocopies of the Invigilation Certificate (IC). The original document must be completed and returned; this must correctly identify **all** candidates as either present or absent. If you have multiple groups taking the test at different times during the day, please ensure details are collated and recorded together on the original IC.

Level 4 panel review - reminder

As we indicated last month any completed Level 4 key skills portfolios ready for review by our expert panel will need to be submitted by **Monday 23 June**. Please ensure that full assessor and internal verifier records are included with the evidence; the portfolio should be sent to:

Key Skills Team (Level 4 Panel Review)
BITES Sector
City & Guilds
1 Giltspur Street
London
EC1A 9DD.

The next opportunity to submit Level 4 portfolios for review by the panel (mandatory for **all** Level 4 key skills qualifications) will be towards the end of the autumn.

Who can assess/deliver key skills?

We're often asked if there are any specific practitioner requirements for the key skills qualifications. Although it is vital that anybody teaching or assessing key skills must be competent and confident in the skills being assessed, as well as fully *au fait* with the QCA key skills standards and guidance document, there are no formal qualification requirements.

In particular, please be aware that the NVQ Assessor and Verifier (A&V) awards (or their forerunners D32/D33/D34) are **not** required to assess or internally verify key skills.

Nevertheless, we would encourage key skills practitioners to acquire the key skills qualifications themselves, ideally at a level above the level they are assessing at. This has the dual advantage of confirming competence in the skills being taught and assessed as well as encouraging empathy with the process of gathering suitable portfolio evidence and completing the key skills tests.

By contrast, new teachers of adult literacy and/or adult numeracy in England are expected to hold or be working towards Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) status with a relevant Level 5 subject specialist qualification. At this stage, we cannot be certain what the future practitioner requirements for functional skills might be.

More information about these requirements is available from www.cityandguilds.com/qtls.

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In this month's *Key skills news*:

- Key skills accreditation extension until 2010 now confirmed
- Level 4 portfolio panel review – summer 2008
- ICT Level 3 and 4 data files – a reminder

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Key skills accreditation extension until 2010 now confirmed

Although we have been aware that the key skills qualifications were due to continue until at least 2010, this has now been confirmed formally on the National Database of Accredited Qualifications (NDAQ).

The last registration and last certification dates for all 24 key skills qualifications are now 31 August 2010 and 31 August 2012 respectively, after which we expect the 'main three' key skills qualifications to be replaced by functional skills in England and the new 'converged skills' qualifications in Wales. In Northern Ireland, key skills has already been largely superseded by the Essential Skills qualifications (3800).

Level 4 portfolio panel review – summer 2008

As we have indicated in previous issues of *Key skills news*, all completed **Level 4** key skills portfolios must be reviewed by our expert panel before certification may be claimed. This additional quality assurance measure was introduced in 2004, and takes into account the highly specialist nature of key skills evidence at this level. Key skills portfolio evidence at all other levels is quality assured through our normal process of external verification.

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Key skills news...



The next panel meeting will take place in early July, and any portfolios submitted for consideration at this meeting must be received no later than **Monday 23 June**.

If you have any **completed** Level 4 portfolios for the panel to consider, please send them as soon as possible to:

Key Skills Team (Level 4 Panel Review)
BITES Sector
City & Guilds
1 Giltspur Street
London
EC1A 9DD.

Please ensure that you enclose all assessor and internal verifier records with the evidence; and also ensure your external verifier is aware that the portfolio(s) is being submitted for review.

The panel will normally look at every portfolio submitted although it may be acceptable to send in a sample where one assessor and/or internal verifier has overseen a significant number of Level 4 portfolios (eg more than six). Where this is the case, please contact us as soon as possible (by emailing keyskills@cityandguilds.com) to discuss how best to proceed.

After this meeting, the next panel review is due to take place in early December.

ICT Level 3 and 4 data files – a reminder

As we're in the midst of the busy exam season, it may be helpful to remind you about the need to ensure candidates taking the Level 3 or Level 4 Key Skills ICT test have access to the **complete set** of data files.

The current set of files for all tests up to, and including, September 2008 are located at www.qca.org.uk/qca_13459.aspx; the site includes instructions for downloading and storing the files locally. Downloading must not be left until the day of the test and candidates require access to **all** 2007-08 data file folders – not just the specific files required for the test they are taking. Please also ensure that your examinations staff are fully aware of this requirement as we usually receive at least a couple of panic phone calls from exams officers who have only discovered that they need to provide these files when opening the paper on the day of the test!

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In this month's *Key skills news*:

- Goodbye to the Key Skills Support Programme (in England)
- Credit values agreed for key skills qualifications (Wales only)
- Using old key skills portfolio evidence
- Time extensions on GOLLA now self-service

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Goodbye to the Key Skills Support Programme (in England)

After nine years of supporting the delivery of key skills in England, the Key Skills Support Programme (KSSP) formally came to an end on 31 March 2008. City & Guilds has always been a strong supporter of KSSP and we are truly sorry to see it go.

Nevertheless, KSSP has left behind an invaluable legacy of resources and other support materials for key skills practitioners and learners. Some of this good work will now be taken forward by the **Functional Skills Support Programme**, although we have been assured that most of KSSP's materials will continue to be available at least until 2010.

KSSP's website (www.keyskillssupport.net) is still live for the time being, although we understand the content will shortly be migrated to the **QIA Excellence Gateway**. The keyskills4u.com learner site, helpline (0870 872 8081) and email address (kssp@LSNeducation.org.uk) will all continue to be available.

Meanwhile in Wales, the **Key Skills Support Programme Cymru** (managed by the former Dysg team within DCELLS) is most certainly continuing!

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Key skills news...



Credit values agreed for key skills qualifications (Wales only)

As part of the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) project, the key skills qualifications have recently been credit-rated and assigned **six** credits per qualification.

The credit rating is based on a notional amount of learning time involved in progressing from one level to the next. With a qualification like key skills this can only ever be a very rough approximation and may not always take into account the way that key skills development and evidence gathering can be incorporated into learners' main programme.

It is important to emphasise that these credit values apply only to Wales and are distinct from the new Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) that is due to replace the National Qualifications Framework across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. There are no plans to put the key skills qualifications on the QCF, as they are due to be replaced from 2010 in any event.

Using old key skills portfolio evidence

We've discussed this issue in previous editions of *Key skills news* (most recently Issue 29 last August). Please note that portfolio evidence for any key skills qualifications awarded after August 2006 **must** have been assessed and claimed against the 2004 key skills standards.

We are occasionally asked if candidates with previous key skills portfolio achievement under the 2000 specifications can still use this towards a full key skills qualification if they sit and pass the relevant key skills tests. The answer is they **cannot** unless their portfolio evidence is re-assessed against the current key skills standards. 2000-spec evidence will in most cases cover all the 2004-standard Part B requirements, although when signing off the evidence the assessor must be confident that the portfolio reflects the candidate's current capabilities. If the standard NVQ model of currency is applied, this would generally preclude evidence that is more than three years old.

Time extensions on GOLLA now self-service

Where candidates taking key skills tests online using GOLLA are entitled to additional time for Access reasons, this can now be set up locally without needing to arrange each individual case with our Policy and Regulation team. It's now possible to enable a standard 25% time extension, either whilst scheduling the test or at any time before the scheduled start-time.

Any non-standard time extensions for more than 25% still need to be requested in advance and arranged with Policy and Regulation (cas@cityandguilds.com).

Please remember that a copy of the evidence supporting any Access arrangements should be retained by your centre. Please complete form Access 3 and submit to Data Management, City & Guilds by the end of the month in which the test took place. The form is available from www.cityandguilds.com/policy.

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- The complete package – and Europass too!
- Embedding key skills – don't forget our Resource document
- Communicating better – see our *Skills for Life news* questionnaire

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Key skills news...

The complete package – and Europass too!

This month we're launching ten new apprenticeship packages where all of the City & Guilds qualifications that make up the framework (NVQ, Technical Certificate and key skills qualifications) can be accessed through a single point of registration.

The new packages include:

Customer Service
Catering and Hospitality
Business Administration
Hairdressing
Health and Social Care
Children's Care, Learning and Development
Exercise and Fitness
Spa Therapy
Beauty Therapy
Nail Services

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The packages are designed to streamline administration and in most cases work out cheaper than registering for each of the qualifications separately. As an added incentive, candidates completing these qualifications via a package receive in addition to their qualification certificates:

- a City & Guilds apprenticeship Learner Record of Achievement
- a Europass Certificate Supplement for each qualification achieved.

City & Guilds is the first UK awarding body to launch the Europass Certificate Supplement. It provides additional information (eg for a prospective employer) about what the qualification entails and the skills covered. For more information, go to www.cityandguilds.com/europass.

Embedding key skills – don't forget our Resource document

If you're looking for guidance on how to integrate the development of key skills (teaching, as well as evidence gathering) with learners' main vocational programme, our Embedding Skills for Life Resource document is a great starting point.

This document, originally produced as part of a DfES-funded programme, contains a number of useful tips on how to analyse vocational tasks for key skills and literacy/numeracy content, as well as how to SMOG documents for readability.

A raft of other embedding support materials is available from www.totallyskilled.org.uk, including an **interactive demonstration** of the SMOG tool.

Communicating better – see our *Skills for Life news* questionnaire

Finally, if you've seen this month's *Skills for Life news* you'll see there's a questionnaire attached asking about how we provide information about our literacy, language, numeracy and employability qualification.

Please also feel free to use the questionnaire to tell us what you think about *Key skills news* and whether there's anything in particular you think we could improve. Alternatively, please let us know your thoughts via keyskills@cityandguilds.com.

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For the attention of the
key skills co-ordinator

Issue 35 – February 2008

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- Get Functional – managing the transition to functional skills
- On-demand paper tests – watch this space...
- Please take care when packing test scripts!
- How can we communicate better?

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Get Functional – managing the transition to functional skills

We're delighted to announce a series of forum events aimed at key skills co-ordinators and managers interested in finding out more about the new Functional Skills awards.

The day will help you prepare for the new qualifications (available to all from 2010) and ensure a smooth transition.

Please note the *Get Functional* forums are aimed at centres **not** currently piloting Functional Skills awards with City & Guilds (separate briefing events have been organised for them).

Purpose/overview of day

- Familiarise with the functional skills standards and consider implications for teaching and learning.
- Learn more about the functional skills pilot (and opportunities to join it).
- View City & Guilds' functional skills assessments developed for the pilot and discuss how these are likely to evolve by and after 2010.
- Understand the support available from City & Guilds and elsewhere.
- Network and share experiences.

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Key skills news...



When and where are they?

All events will be taking place at City & Guilds' English regional offices. Dates/venues are:

- Wakefield – Friday 11 April 2008
- St Ives (Huntingdon) – Thursday 17 April 2008
- Birmingham – Monday 21 April 2008
- Newcastle – Thursday 24 April 2008
- London (1) – Thursday 1 May 2008
- Warrington – Wednesday 7 May 2008
- Alfreton – Thursday 15 May 2008
- Taunton – Tuesday 27 May 2008
- London (2) – Friday 30 May 2008

For more information and to book your place, please go to www.cityandguilds.com/events.

On-demand paper tests – watch this space...

If you read *Skills for Life news* you may have gathered that we're introducing a new on-demand system for accessing the paper-based adult numeracy/literacy national tests.

For the time being, key skills candidates accessing the level 1-2 paper-based tests will continue to be restricted to the fixed-date test opportunities published in our Catalogue (eg March, May, June and September). However, we are intending to introduce a similar on-demand system for key skills from the autumn. This will allow tests to be booked for any time on any day, as well as delivering other benefits such as unnamed candidate entries and much faster results turnaround.

We'll provide more detailed information about these new arrangements nearer the time.

Please take care when packing test scripts!

Could we remind you of the need to ensure all key skills test scripts are packed carefully and securely when being dispatched for marking.

One of our level 3 markers recently received a consignment of scripts that arrived like this:



Please ensure in particular that all envelopes/packages:

- are robust and big enough to take the number of scripts being sent without overfilling (use more than one if necessary)
- are clearly addressed and adequately sealed
- have sufficient paid postage.

Please also ensure scripts and answer sheets are always posted on the **same day** as the test (or the following day if the test takes place after last collection).

How can we communicate better?

Finally, we're currently reviewing how we provide information about the key skills and related qualifications, looking in particular to see what improvements we can make to *Key skills news* and the website.

Look out for a questionnaire in next month's *Key skills news*, although if you've any ideas in the meantime please get in touch (via keyskills@cityandguilds.com).

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- Use of images within Communication

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What can/can't be used as a proxy?

We're often asked for advice on whether particular qualifications entitle candidates to proxy exemption, and in particular whether any international qualifications can be used.

QCA maintains the definitive list of approved proxy qualifications (see www.qca.org.uk/qca_6562.aspx). These are the qualifications that have been approved by the three regulators (QCA, DCELLS and CCEA) to act as proxies and **no other qualifications may be used to claim proxy exemption**.

This list of approved proxy qualifications is largely confined to qualifications on the National Qualifications Framework (ie those regulated by QCA/DCELLS/CCEA). The only exceptions are a limited number of Scottish qualifications (eg Standard Grade English) and the Irish Leaving Certificate. These have been included as a result of specific agreements between QCA and its partner regulators in Scotland and the Republic of Ireland; international qualifications (eg International GCSEs) otherwise cannot be accepted under any circumstances.

Our administrative procedures for checking and claiming proxies are set out on pages 26-27 of our key skills centre guide. We included more detailed guidance about the use of proxy qualifications and procedures for logging partial key skills achievement with other awarding bodies in Issue 22 (April 2006) of *Key skills news*.

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Key skills news...



Use of images within Communication

Part B of the standards for Communication requires candidates to make use of at least one image when obtaining or conveying information. The QCA key skills standards and guidance document sets out the detail of what is required at each level, although in all cases the image must have a clear and evident purpose.

The image can be any non-textual representation that conveys information. For example, where candidates are integrating evidence towards more than one key skill in the same portfolio, the graph or chart (not a table) needed for Application of Number might also satisfy the image requirement for Communication.

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- How test dates appear on the catalogue – each test isn't really 8 hours long!
- Key skills fee structure
- End of year round-up

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How test dates appear on the catalogue – each test isn't really 8 hours long!

If you have been using the new City & Guilds catalogue (replacement for the Directory) you may have noticed that each key skills test is now displayed with a default start-finish time (09:00 – 17:00).

Please ignore the default times and be assured that the tests are not really 8 hours long!

As before, all paper-based key skills tests can take place at any time between 00:01 and 23:59 on the specified date. In the case of ICT at levels 3 and 4, there is actually a 72-hour window (00:01 on Wednesday to 23:59 on Friday).

Test lengths are always shown on the front of each question paper; for reference they set out on the following page:

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Level(s)	Key skill	Test duration
1 and 2	Communication	1 hour
	ICT	1 hour
1 and 2	Application of Number	1 hour 15 minutes
3	Communication	1 hour 30 minutes
	ICT	
3	Application of Number	1 hour 30 minutes (plus 15 minutes reading time)
4	Communication	2 hours 30 minutes
	Application of Number	
	ICT	

Key skills fee structure

With the new catalogue containing less explanatory text than the old 3638 Directory page, it might be helpful to outline how our key skills fee structure works (and what the various fees quoted in the catalogue actually mean).

Fees for 3638-01 (applicable to all centres except in Wales)

1. Single point of registration for all 24 key skills qualifications. The registration fee is the same whether candidates are intending to complete one key skills qualification or all 24! The current registration fee is £6.50 per candidate.
2. There is a charge for each paper test entry or for each online test taken. There are different fees for 'written' (levels 3 and 4) and 'multiple choice' (levels 1 and 2) (£8.70 and £7.70, respectively). There is a smaller fee (currently £7.10) for each online test taken.
3. Results Entry claims are free of charge for Comm/AoN/ICT portfolios, although Results Entry for the three wider key skills is subject to a fee (currently £5.40).
4. There is also a Results Entry fee for claiming proxy exemption (currently £3.30) to cover administration costs.

The total fees for a candidate completing Communication, Application of Number and Working With Others, all at Level 2 (taking both tests online and passing at the first attempt), would therefore be:

£6.50 qualification registration	£7.10 Comm L2 test	£7.10 AoN L2 test	£0.00 Comm L2 portfolio	£0.00 AoN L2 portfolio	£5.40 WVO L2 portfolio
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making a total of **£26.10**.

Fees for 3638-12 (centres in Wales only – single fee route)

1. Single point of registration for all 24 key skills qualifications. The registration fee is the same whether candidates are intending to complete one key skills qualification or all 24! The current registration fee is £21.90 per candidate.
2. There are no charges for any other transactions (portfolio or proxy Results Entry). The key skills tests are not required or available to centres in Wales.

The total fees for a candidate completing Communication, Application of Number and Working With Others, all at Level 2, would therefore be:

£21.90 qualification registration	£0.00 Comm L2 portfolio	£0.00 AoN L2 portfolio	£0.00 WWO L2 portfolio
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making a total of **£21.90**.

Fees for 3638-13 (centres in Wales only – ‘pay-as-you-go’ route)

1. Single point of registration for all 24 key skills qualifications. The registration fee is the same whether candidates are intending to complete one key skills qualification or all 24! The current registration fee is £6.50 per candidate.
2. Portfolio Results Entry claims (for all six key skills) are subject to a fee (currently £5.40).
3. There is also a Results Entry fee for claiming proxy exemption (currently £3.30) to cover administration costs. As there are no tests, this only applies in the handful of cases where the proxy qualification also provides exemption from the portfolio (usually only for ICT).

The total fees for a candidate completing Communication, Application of Number and Working With Others, all at Level 2, would therefore be:

£6.50 qualification registration	£5.40 Comm L2 portfolio	£5.40 AoN L2 portfolio	£5.40 WWO L2 portfolio
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making a total of **£22.70**.

End of year round-up

Finally, may we wish you a very happy Christmas and festive period. This year has seen yet more changes and challenges within the key skills world, and next year is shaping up to be every bit as frenetic!

In England, functional skills are looming large and our first live pilot is just getting underway – do check out *Functional skills news* (if you haven't already done so) as this provides a monthly commentary on pilot and other issues around these qualifications.

College mergers have brought huge changes within Northern Ireland, and the launch of Training for Success last September has resulted in many more work-based providers delivering the Essential Skills qualifications (3800) instead of key skills for the first time. Our EV team and the Northern Ireland office are continuing to work closely with 3800 centres as the impact of these changes unfolds.

In Wales, we are liaising with DCELLS (as they are now called) over the Welsh Assembly Government's proposed new suite of 'converged' qualifications that are set to replace key skills and adult numeracy/literacy from 2010.

Wherever you are, City & Guilds will continue to work with and support you during 2008. Please do enjoy the break (as little or as much as you're able to grab!).

More information about our key skills qualifications can be found on this dedicated City & Guilds website: www.key-skills.org

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Key skills qualifications

Information relates to 3638 and any qualification packages including access to key skills qualifications

Levels 1 to 4

In this month's *Key skills news*:

- Level 4 portfolios – reminder about arrangements for autumn 2007 panel review
- ICT level 3 (and 4) tests data files

Key skills news is published every month and contains all the latest information and updates about the key skills qualifications awarded by City & Guilds.

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A full archive of this newsletter is also available on our key skills 'Latest news' page.

Level 4 portfolios – reminder about arrangements for autumn 2007 panel review

The closing date for receiving any level 4 key skills portfolios for the next panel review is **Monday 19 November**. As we have indicated in previous issues of *Key skills news*, all completed level 4 key skills portfolios **must** be submitted to the expert panel for review **before** certification may be claimed.

If you have any completed level 4 portfolios that are ready for the panel to consider, and haven't already done so, please send them straightaway to:

Key Skills Team (Level 4 Panel Review)
BITES Sector
City & Guilds
1 Giltspur Street
London
EC1A 9DD.

Please ensure that you enclose all assessor and internal verifier records with the evidence; please also ensure your external verifier is aware that the portfolios are being submitted for review.

Every effort has been made to ensure that the information contained in this publication is true and correct at time of going to press. However, City & Guilds products and services are subject to continuous development and improvement and the right is reserved to change Products and services from time to time. City & Guilds cannot accept liability for loss or damage arising from the use of information in this publication. City & Guilds is a registered charity established to promote education and training.

Key skills news...



The panel will normally look at every portfolio submitted although it may be acceptable to send in a sample where one assessor and/or internal verifier has overseen a significant number of level 4 portfolios (eg more than six). Where this is the case, please contact us as soon as possible (by emailing keyskills@cityandguilds.com) to discuss how best to proceed.

The next panel review meeting will take place next summer; the closing date for this meeting will be **Monday 23 June 2008**.

ICT level 3 (and 4) tests data files

As we reported in Issue 30 of *Key skills news*, QCA has refreshed the Key Skills ICT tests data files. The current set of files, needed for all level 3 and level 4 tests series up to and including September 2008, are located at www.qca.org.uk/qca_13459.aspx; the site includes instructions for downloading and storing the files.

The files should be downloaded and stored locally **well in advance** of any tests taking place. Candidates need access to the files beforehand so that they can become familiar with the forms of data used. When taking a test, candidates should have access to the complete set of 2007-08 data files (selecting the appropriate files is one of the skills being assessed).

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- Relaxations and proxies – what's the difference again?
- DCSF key skills achievement data for 2005-06 now available
- Key skills' contribution to school achievement/attainment tables

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Relaxations and proxies – what's the difference again?

We last included information about the Relaxation arrangements for learners on apprenticeship programmes in Issue 27 of *Key skills news* (June 2007), although it may be helpful to summarise the differences between relaxations and proxy exemption.

- **Relaxations** apply specifically to apprenticeships (in England and Wales, note different arrangements now apply in Northern Ireland). The ruling allows learners who already have GCSEs at Grade C or higher in English (Language or Literature), Mathematics or ICT to be excused from the framework requirement to complete Communication, Application of Number or ICT, respectively.

Since this relates to framework completion rather than qualification attainment, responsibility for granting relaxations rests with the relevant Sector Skills Council (SSC). City & Guilds plays no part in the granting of relaxations, although where learners are entitled to relaxation from all of the key skills specified in the framework there is no need to register them for the key skills qualifications with City & Guilds.

Only GCSE qualifications may be used to claim relaxations, and these must have been less than five years old when the learner began his/her apprenticeship.

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Key skills news...



- Proxy exemption**, on the other hand, relates to the assessment requirements where a candidate is registered and working towards a key skills qualification. Prior attainment of any qualification included on QCA's list of approved proxy qualifications (see www.qca.org.uk/qca_6562.aspx) can be used to *proxy* for attaining a pass grade in the relevant key skills test (some proxy qualifications, almost always for ICT, can also proxy for the portfolio).

The proxy qualification must be less than three years old at the time the key skills qualification it is being used towards is achieved (eg if the proxy qualification was awarded in the summer of 2005, it could only be used towards a key skills qualification completed before the end of August 2008). Details of the arrangements for checking and claiming proxies can be found on pages 26-27 of our key skills centre guide.

Confusingly, the list of approved proxy qualifications includes GCSEs. However, proxy exemption and relaxations are two an entirely separate sets of regulations.

DCSF key skills achievement data for 2005-06 now available

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), one half of the former DfES, has recently published an updated Statistical First Release detailing key skills qualification attainments up to September 2006.

The data includes age, gender and centre type, as well as the number of key skills qualifications awarded at each level in each of the six key skill areas. It is available from www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000724/index.shtml.

Although published by DCSF, this data includes attainment in Wales and Northern Ireland as well as in England.

Key skills' contribution to school achievement/attainment tables

If you are offering key skills qualifications within a school or sixth form college, please be aware that QCA has assigned the following Points Scores to these qualifications for use in School Achievement and Attainment performance tables:

Key skill	Points score	Level 1 threshold	Contributes to	
			Level 2 threshold	Level 3 threshold
Level 1	18.8	15%	-	-
Level 2	34.5	15%	15%	-
Level 3-4	63.0	24%	24%	15%

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