

Ofqual Functional Skills thematic review: changes to City & Guilds externally-marked Functional Skills assessments

Contents

Introduction	3
How will these changes affect City & Guilds' Functional Skills assessments?	3
Functional Skills English	4
Changes to Functional Skills English Reading at Level 1	4
Changes to Functional Skills English Writing at Level 1	5
Changes to Functional Skills English Reading at Level 2.....	6
Changes to Functional Skills English Writing at Level 2	7
Functional Skills Maths	8
Changes to Functional Skills Mathematics at Level 1	8
Changes to Functional Skills Mathematics at Level 2	8

Introduction

In January 2015, Ofqual published the results of its thematic review of Functional Skills. The review focused particularly on Functional Skills qualifications in English and Mathematics at Level 2, looking at *all* of the awarding organisations that currently offer these qualifications.

The report contained many positive comments about Functional Skills, noting that over a million Functional Skills qualifications are awarded in England each year (more than any other type of qualification besides GCSE), as well as reiterating that these are important 'gateway' qualifications for learners in a wide range of settings.

The thematic review also identified a number of areas for improvement, including changes to the design of awarding organisations' assessment materials so they:

- better reflected the full range of skills specified in the qualification/subject criteria, and
- contained more 'stretch' and explicit focus on problem-solving.

As well as making these recommendations, Ofqual is also pressing for **greater consistency of standards between awarding organisations**, with more of a 'level playing field' in the demand of assessments.

It's therefore important to appreciate that **all awarding organisations' Functional Skills assessments will be changing over the next few months.**

How will these changes affect City & Guilds' Functional Skills assessments?

Following the thematic review, we're also now working on some changes to each of our externally-marked Functional Skills assessments in English and mathematics. Most of these will come into effect from **September 2015**, although a couple of changes (eg to the time allowance for Functional Skills English Writing at Level 2) have already been introduced.

This document sets out in more detail what changes are coming, and how they will affect each individual Functional Skills component and qualification.

Look out for changes at Level 1, as well as Level 2

Whilst the thematic review only looked specifically at Level 2, in practice some of the recommendations were also pertinent to our Level 1 assessments, and are therefore being introduced to ensure consistency between the levels.

Functional Skills English

Changes to Functional Skills English Reading at Level 1

What will change?	By when?
<p>Realistic scenarios</p> <p>Assessment tasks are being reviewed to ensure they reflect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) real life situations as much as possible b) situations to which most candidates are likely to be able to relate <p>Source materials and graphics used in assessments will be redesigned to look more authentic and bear more visual resemblance to what candidates might expect to see in their daily activities.</p>	September 2015
<p>Increased openness of questions/tasks</p> <p>Less guidance and structure will be given, to ensure candidates approach the tasks more holistically.</p> <p>This is likely to involve fewer 'lists', with candidates expected to provide more extended responses and explanations.</p>	September 2015
<p>Greater flexibility within questions/tasks</p> <p>The assessments will be less 'formulaic' in their presentation, with a greater variety in tasks drawn from the Functional Skills English Subject Criteria (eg bias or opinion, language, layout).</p> <p>Assessment preparation will therefore need to focus on the full coverage and range set out in the Subject Criteria, and there should be less reliance on sample papers to 'predict' what's likely to come up in live assessments.</p>	September 2015

Changes to Functional Skills English Writing at Level 1

What will change?	By when?
<p>Use of grammar/spell-checkers (and other 'routine' equipment)</p> <p>For the avoidance of doubt, it is now stated explicitly on the front of each Functional Skills English Writing onscreen and paper assessment that candidates may use grammar and/or spell-checking devices (as long as these cannot access the internet or otherwise transmit/receive information).</p> <p>As the Functional Skills qualification handbook documents already explain, there is no finite list of items permitted or prohibited during these assessments. Candidates are expected to deploy their normal methods of working, and within reason should therefore be able to access any equipment routinely available to them as long as this does not:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enable them to communicate/collude with other candidates or anyone external to the assessment • include pre-prepared notes, crib-sheets, tutor-developed or other materials designed <i>specifically</i> to assist with this assessment. 	January 2015
<p>Realistic scenarios</p> <p>Assessment tasks are being reviewed to ensure they reflect:</p> <p>a) real life situations as much as possible b) situations to which most candidates are likely to be able to relate</p> <p>Source materials and graphics used in assessments will be redesigned to look more authentic and bear more visual resemblance to what candidates might expect to see in their daily activities.</p> <p>Writing tasks will include some stimulus material to provide more realistic context to the scenario/task.</p>	September 2015
<p>Increased openness of questions/tasks</p> <p>Less guidance and structure will be given, to ensure candidates approach the tasks more holistically.</p> <p>Writing activities will be more open, to enable candidates to provide more extended and developed responses.</p>	September 2015

Changes to Functional Skills English Reading at Level 2

What will change?	By when?
<p>Realistic scenarios</p> <p>Assessment tasks are being reviewed to ensure they reflect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) real life situations as much as possible b) situations to which most candidates are likely to be able to relate <p>Source materials and graphics used in assessments will be redesigned to look more authentic and bear more visual resemblance to what candidates might expect to see in their daily activities.</p>	September 2015
<p>Increased openness of questions/tasks</p> <p>Less guidance and structure will be given, to ensure candidates approach the tasks more holistically.</p> <p>Candidates will be expected to provide more extended responses and explanations. There will be fewer opportunities to simply 'list' responses.</p>	September 2015
<p>Greater flexibility within questions/tasks</p> <p>The assessments will be less 'formulaic' in their presentation, with a greater variety in tasks drawn from the Functional Skills English Subject Criteria (eg bias or opinion, language, layout).</p> <p>Assessment preparation will therefore need to focus on the full coverage and range set out in the Subject Criteria, and there should be less reliance on sample papers to 'predict' what's likely to come up in live assessments.</p>	September 2015
<p>Number of source documents/texts</p> <p>The number of reading texts included in each assessment paper will be more varied, depending on the requirements of the task.</p> <p>The most common pattern will be three documents per assessment, although in some instances it could be four.</p>	September 2015

Changes to Functional Skills English Writing at Level 2

What will change?	By when?
<p>Time allowance change</p> <p>Both the Level 1 and Level 2 Functional Skills English Writing assessments were originally designed to last for an hour, although for historic reasons the time allowance for Level 2 included an additional 15 minutes' notional 'reading time'.</p> <p>Since the Writing assessments no longer involve having to digest lengthy source documents, this allowance for reading has now been reduced by 10 minutes, making the total time allowance now 1 hour 5 minutes.</p>	January 2015
<p>Use of grammar/spell-checkers (and other 'routine' equipment)</p> <p>For the avoidance of doubt, it is now stated explicitly on the front of each FS English Writing onscreen and paper assessment that candidates may use grammar and/or spell-checking devices (as long as these cannot access the internet or otherwise transmit/receive information).</p> <p>As the Functional Skills qualification handbook documents already explain, there is no finite list of items permitted or prohibited during these assessments. Candidates are expected to deploy their normal methods of working, and within reason should therefore be able to access any equipment routinely available to them as long as this does not:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enable them to communicate/collude with other candidates or anyone external to the assessment • include pre-prepared notes, crib-sheets, tutor-developed or other materials designed <i>specifically</i> to assist with this assessment. 	January 2015
<p>Realistic scenarios</p> <p>Assessment tasks are being reviewed to ensure they reflect:</p> <p>a) real life situations as much as possible b) situations to which most candidates are likely to be able to relate</p> <p>Source materials and graphics used in assessments will be redesigned to look more authentic and bear more visual resemblance to what candidates might expect to see in their daily activities.</p> <p>Writing tasks will include some stimulus material to provide more realistic context to the scenario/task.</p>	September 2015
<p>Increased openness of questions/tasks</p> <p>Less guidance and structure will be given, to ensure candidates approach the tasks more holistically.</p> <p>Writing activities will be more open, to enable candidates to provide more extended and developed responses.</p>	September 2015
<p>Higher order skills</p> <p>Candidates will be expected to demonstrate a minimum level of attainment across all areas to the Functional Skills English Writing skill standard in order to achieve a</p>	September 2015

'pass' grade. For example, a candidate with weak Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar (SPaG) would not be able to pass solely as a result of scoring well on the 'content' marks.

Functional Skills Maths

Changes to Functional Skills Mathematics at Level 1

What will change?	By when?
Realistic scenarios Assessment tasks are being reviewed to ensure they reflect: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) real life situations as much as possible b) situations to which most candidates are likely to be able to relate Source materials and graphics used in assessments will be redesigned to look more authentic and bear more visual resemblance to what candidates might expect to see in their daily activities.	September 2015

Changes to Functional Skills Mathematics at Level 2

What will change?	By when?
Realistic scenarios Assessment tasks are being reviewed to ensure they reflect: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) real life situations as much as possible b) situations to which most candidates are likely to be able to relate Source materials and graphics used in assessments will be redesigned to look more authentic and bear more visual resemblance to what candidates might expect to see in their daily activities.	September 2015
Increased openness of questions/tasks Less guidance and structure will be given, to ensure candidates approach the tasks more holistically. Activities will be more open to enable candidates to provide more extended and developed responses, particularly in planning and analysis of the task.	September 2015
Checking and evaluating Candidates will be asked more to reflect and comment on the methods/answers they have chosen within the tasks.	September 2015

Time allowance change

Given the need to provide more developed and extended responses in the revised assessments, the time allowance is being **increased** by 30 minutes, making the total time allowance in the new-format assessments **2 hours**.

September 2015

