

Functional skills qualification reform 2019

New functional skills qualifications are almost here. The following is a brief introduction to the main changes taking place from September 2019 and how these changes affect learners:

- From September 2019 on all newly registered functional skills learners need to work towards revised qualifications.
- Increase of recommended guided learning hours from 45 to 55 which will mean somewhat more content.
- The qualifications are still about applying maths and English to purposeful contexts.
- For English the focus is on spelling, punctuation and grammar without dictionaries or computer aids; and at Entry levels there are now detailed reading and spelling expectations based on the structured teaching of phonics.
- For maths there's more of an emphasis on the underpinning knowledge and skills required to solve mathematical problems including tasks such as using times tables and working with and without a calculator.

Current functional skills maths and English qualifications close to new registrations on 31 August 2019. Last certification for the legacy qualification will be 31 August 2020. In other words, learners who have not achieved all the relevant elements of the legacy qualifications by this time will have to start again with the new qualifications.

Functional skills

- are practical skills in English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) that allow individuals to operate confidently, effectively and independently in life and work
- qualifications which are equivalent level to GCSEs.

Changes to qualifications:

- Many components stay the same and there is a greater emphasis on meaningful and real-life contexts such as workplace
- Level 1 and level 2 assessments will be externally set and externally marked, except for the speaking, listening and communicating component, which will still be internally assessed by the provider
- The aim is to build on the skills learned in previous levels as well as encompassing the skills of the previous levels to the next level
- No spiky profiles any longer – within English all three components (speaking, listening and communicating, and reading and writing) must be achieved at same level for a pass
- Maths continues to have three components (numbers, measure and shape, and data handling) which all need to be passed
- Entry level English includes word lists learners are required to read and spell correctly
- Phonics has also been added to Entry level English to build learners' reading skills
- Dictionaries or spellcheck equipment cannot be used in writing assessments
- To develop learners' underpinning maths skills calculators are not allowed in 25 per cent of the assessment tasks/questions.

There are some handy mapping documents available to compare the differences between the new functional skills content statements and the legacy criteria for [English](#) and [maths](#). The awarding organisations also offer sample assessment papers online.

Things for unions and union learning reps to consider:

- Discuss with your learning provider how they inform new and existing learners about the changes
- Ask the learning provider how changes such as non-calculator section of the maths assessments or how excluding spellcheckers and dictionaries from the writing component is managed
- Consider the impact removing spellcheck and dictionary equipment may have on learners with particular disabilities such as dyslexia
- Ensure that the externally set and marked assessments are accessible, flexible and varied to meet learners' needs
- Make sure learners completing the legacy qualifications are set to take their internal and external assessments well in time so that they can get their certification before 31 August 2020 – check the timetables with the provider

- Brief union learning reps and project staff of practical implications.
- Changes in guided learning hours may have an impact on agreements with employers regarding paid time off for learning.

Find out more:

Functional skills subject content for [English](#) and [maths](#)

Ofqual [Functional Skills qualifications](#)

Education and Training Foundation [Post-16 phonics approaches: a toolkit](#)

Unionlearn guidance on [English, maths and digital skills](#)

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