

NCFE's Essential Guide to **FUNCTIONAL SKILLS**

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Watch your skills grow

Where Service Matters

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What are Functional Skills?

Functional Skills qualifications are designed to provide learners with practical skills in English, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Mathematics which will help them to 'function' confidently, effectively and independently in their work and life in general.

These new qualifications have been developed in response to the employability needs set out in the Government's 14-19 Education and Skills White Paper.

Functional Skills qualifications offer learners the chance to gain useful, transferrable skills and will eventually replace Key Skills in Communication, Application of Number and ICT.

The qualifications will also be constituent elements of new Foundation, Higher and Advanced Diplomas.

The key milestone for Functional Skills is Level 2, which is seen as the minimum requirement for functioning in life, learning and work.

To ensure that Functional Skills are readily accessible to the full range of learners, they're currently being offered as stand alone qualifications at Entry Level, Level 1 and Level 2 during the 3 year Functional Skills pilot that began in September 2007.

What is the Functional Skills pilot?

The pilot, organised by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), will ensure that the qualifications are effective and relevant to learners and that the assessment methods are appropriate and fit for purpose.

Over 2,000 centres have been participating in the pilot from September 2007; including schools, colleges, work-based learning and adult community learning.

Who will benefit from Functional Skills and how?

The Functional Skills qualifications will be useful to:

- **learners:** young people and adults will develop important problem solving skills which will make sure that they're well prepared for employment, further learning and life in general
- **employers:** this initiative will help to ensure that employees can apply vital functional skills in work situations which will improve effectiveness and productivity
- **higher education:** competency in the key subjects of English, Mathematics and ICT will help students progress to further achievement, and will allow them to study independently.

Principles of Functional Skills

To be effective, Functional Skills should be fully integrated into the curriculum and allow learners to engage with real situations. The main requirement driving Functional Skills development is the need to ensure that learners can 'do the basics'. This is fundamental to the initiative and will continue to drive delivery and assessment.

Learners need opportunities to:

- use their skills for real purposes and achieve success as a result of using their skills effectively
- integrate learning by linking knowledge within and between the functional areas
- spend time planning and developing their work
- make choices, think creatively and act independently.

NCFE and Functional Skills

NCFE's Functional Skills qualifications are available to all learners. We currently offer Functional Skills in English at Levels 1 and 2, and will be phasing in the other levels and subject areas over the pilot period, with full implementation of all Functional Skills planned for 2010.

NCFE qualifications in Functional Skills

The Functional Skills in English qualifications give learners vital everyday skills, such as being able to read timetables and being able to communicate effectively:

NCFE Level 1 Award in Functional Skills English

QCF Level: **1**

Guided Learning Hours (GLH): **30 – 45**

NCFE Level 2 Award in Functional Skills English

QCF Level: **2**

Guided Learning Hours (GLH): **30 – 45**

We'll soon be introducing new skills and levels. For the most up to date information, please visit www.ncfe.org.uk/functionalskills.

How much do we charge for Functional Skills?

For the most up to date information on fees and pricing for Functional Skills, please visit the Functional Skills pages of our website at www.ncfe.org.uk/functionalskills.

How are Functional Skills assessed?

Assessment approaches vary between awarding organisations. However they will primarily be task-based scenario questions with a specified duration, delivered in a controlled environment. The assessments will support problem solving, skills-based approaches.

The NCFE Functional Skills English qualifications are assessed by the following:

- a short answer task-based question paper, taken in a controlled environment, which assesses the Reading and Writing aspects of the qualifications. Each component carries 50% of the marks for the external assessment
- Speaking and Listening is assessed within centres and externally moderated by NCFE.

However, these assessment methods are a work in progress and we'll be reviewing and improving these according to centre and regulator feedback. We're currently looking into the possibility of moving to use assessment-on-demand in future. For the most up to date assessment information, please visit www.ncfe.org.uk/functionalskills.

NCFE support

Don't forget, if you pilot the Functional Skills qualifications with NCFE you'll receive our high quality support, including:

- a **named contact at head office** in the form of your Centre Support Assistant, so you always know who to contact if you need any help
- an **External Moderator** available to answer any questions you have about moderation or assessment. Each new centre gets an initial training visit with one of our Functional Skills Moderators. This visit covers all aspects of the pilot, including the standards, assessment and evaluation details. Centre contacts also get an information pack at this visit, which contains useful information for pilot centres
- **materials** to support assessment, including sample papers, mark schemes, guidance on Speaking and Listening and a dedicated Functional Skills area on our website at www.ncfe.org.uk/functionalskills.



What other support is available for Functional Skills?

- **Functional Skills regional co-ordinators** - offer bespoke advice to centres, including advice on teaching Functional Skills within the Diploma. Get details at <http://excellence.qia.org.uk/159679>
- **National Strategies regional advisers on Functional Skills** - offer information and advice to centres focusing on Functional Skills. For contact details and more information contact the National Strategies on 0118 918 2820 or email secondary@nationalstrategies.co.uk
- **A team of regional 'Field Forces'** - created to provide support for new and existing centres. There are 9 representatives based in 3 regions, working to support non-consortia centres focusing on Functional Skills. Centres can access information about the representatives by sending an email to secondary@nationalstrategies.co.uk

What's next for Functional Skills with NCFE?

We're now planning ahead and will be introducing further skills and levels soon.

We're planning on introducing the Entry Level Functional Skills qualifications in English, Maths and ICT in June 2009.

We're also planning on bringing Level 1 and 2 Mathematics and ICT Functional Skills qualifications on board in September 2009.

From October 2009 we expect to be delivering all Functional Skills pilot qualifications, subject to Ofqual accreditation.

We're also increasing the number of centres that we're working with for the pilot and are still accepting new centres onto the pilot for year 2. If you'd like to get involved, please send an email to rebeccabrenard@ncfe.org.uk.

If you have any problems or need advice and support, or would like any more information on the Functional Skills qualifications offered by NCFE, just send an email to [Rebecca Brenard](mailto:Rebecca.Brenard@ncfe.org.uk) at rebeccabrenard@ncfe.org.uk, or call Rebecca on 0191 239 8043.

Customer Service - the NCFE way

We think our approach to customer service makes us different - easy to do business with, flexible and responsive. We're different because we offer:

Exceptional customer service

- we're passionate about delivering exceptional customer service
- unlike other awarding bodies, you'll be given a named point of contact and their direct phone line to assist with any queries you may have
- we don't do call centres or call waiting.

Competitive and clear pricing structure

- we're committed to providing you with an easy to understand fees and pricing structure, with no hidden costs
- not only are our registration fees low, but our commitment to customer service makes us incredibly good to work with.

Clear, easy to read qualification information

- NCFE Qualification Specifications are written in plain English and are available to download from our website, www.ncfe.org.uk
- we'll provide you with an easy to use package of supporting materials, including guidance that has been specially designed for learners
- we don't use pompous educational jargon!

Knowledgeable and supportive External Moderators

- to ensure high standards, we ensure our External Moderators attend sector training and standardisation events each academic year
- we'll arrange for your External Moderator to visit you at least once a year to sample your learners' portfolios and provide support
- their aim is to help you, not to place barriers in your way.

Getting started with NCFE couldn't be easier

Already run NCFE qualifications?

- Complete the application to offer additional products form and send to your Centre Support Contact.
- You'll be automatically approved to start running the qualifications you've requested. It's as easy as that.

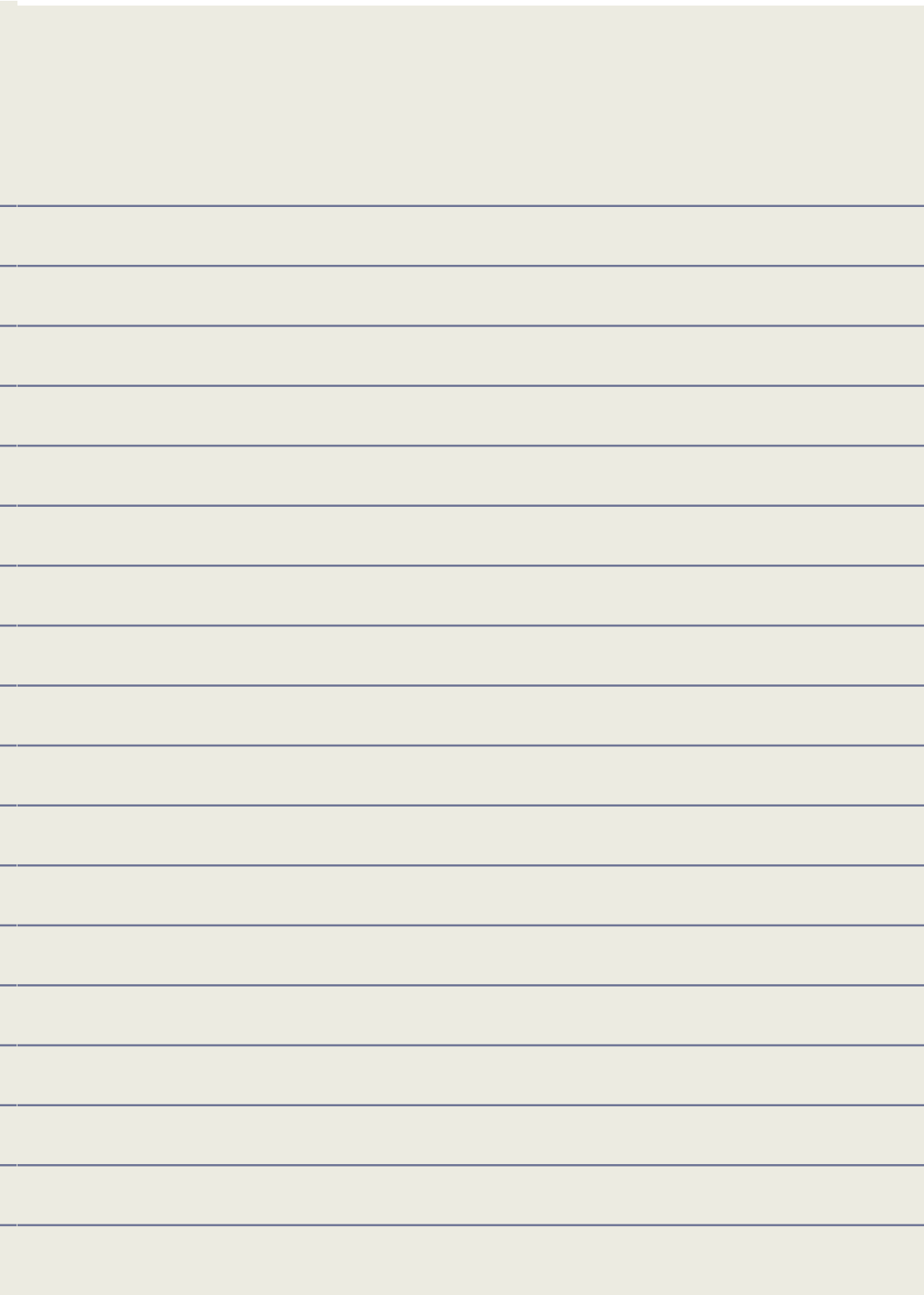
Not already approved by NCFE? Not a problem!

- Complete the application to become an approved centre form.
- If you're currently approved by another recognised awarding body we probably won't even need to carry out an approval visit.
- Once we receive your application form you're good to go.

You can access both application forms at www.ncfe.org.uk.

Need more help?

Our Business Development team is available to all of our centres as well as any centres who are interested in working with us, and can offer you advice on NCFE qualifications and services; simply call us on 0191 239 8000. Contact details are also available at www.ncfe.org.uk/localcontact or you can email us at info@ncfe.org.uk.



Other NCFE Essential Guides

-  DIPLOMAS
-  THE FOUNDATION LEARNING TIER (FLT)
-  THE QUALIFICATIONS AND CREDIT FRAMEWORK (QCF)
-  WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
-  ACCREDITATION SERVICES
-  VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FOR SCHOOLS