



## **Message to the Government: Fund Functional Skills to reduce student stress**

### **More progress is needed to create the 'parity of esteem' between vocational and academic learning**

Over 60 per cent of students sitting their GCSEs this year believe that young people should be given the option to study alternative qualifications in English and maths to GCSEs according to a survey commissioned by awarding organisation, NCFE.

Moreover 70% of the 2,000 respondents argued that students should be able to learn in a style that suits them and that English and maths should be easily applicable to everyday life.

#FullyFunctional, a campaign launched by NCFE today, calls on the Government to provide funding for learners who failed to achieve higher than a Grade 3 (equivalent to grade D in the old system) to sit alternative qualifications, rather than re-sitting the GCSE exams until they pass.

The survey underlines the damaging impact that exam stress can have on students' mental health, with 70% of respondents at school feeling pressure to resit their core GCSEs (Science, English or Maths) if they failed first time. Additionally, over half of respondents (53%) who are currently doing their GCSEs said that this is the most stressful time of their teenage years.

As it stands, the Government only provides backing for learners who achieve a grade 2 or below to study alternative qualifications such as Functional Skills. It has been recorded that learners are retaking the exam up to nine times in order to pass. The awarding organisation would like to see this extended to all learners who fail to achieve above a Grade 3 in their English and maths GCSEs.

#### **Launching #FullyFunctional, Stewart Foster, Managing Director of NCFE, said:**

*"The pressure to resit GCSEs can be hugely overwhelming. One size doesn't fit all, and we need to recognise that the current system is setting some students up to fail."*

*"As our polling data shows, students should be given the opportunity to learn in a style that suits them. Alternative qualifications like Functional Skills ensure that students adopt good standards of numeracy and literacy, whilst being taught the practical skills they need to progress through to further education or work."*

*"Functional Skills is already an option for those who achieve a grade 2 or below, so we'd like to see it extended to those who have failed to achieve higher than grade 3. Students shouldn't have to keep resitting their exams. Instead, acknowledging different learning methods will inevitably lead to more success in the future. Let's create an even greater parity of esteem between academic and vocational learning."*

Functional Skills are developed to allow learners to gain their key skills in English and Maths. The qualifications are designed to help learners engage successfully by applying the skills in a practical way so learners can progress to further learning and employment.

#### **Speaking from experience, Joshua Dixon, Sales & Marketing Director at YourCode Recruitment, said:**

*"Without my functional skills qualifications, I would not have won Company or Entrepreneur of the Year. The Functional Skills qualification gave me my foundations to build upon, helping to progress my skills but also have access to funding and qualifications that I wouldn't have been able to without them."*

**Association of Employment and Learning Providers chief executive Mark Dawe said:**

*"The Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) is clear that maths and English is critical and everyone should strive to achieve as high as they can and as a minimum be functional at level 2. We are happy to support this campaign because every year we wonder how the government can accept another 150,000 GCSE failures and talk about a successful resits policy. It is not the FE sectors fault that GCSE retakes don't work; it is what providers have inherited and the design of a qualification that isn't fit for purpose alongside the development of real workplace skills.*

*"AELP advocates an initial assessment for those 16-year olds that get a D or grade 3 to decide whether they should do a resit or learn functional skills."*

**Former Assistant Head Teacher at St. Joseph's Catholic Academy, Dave Stanton, said:**

*"Making students resit GCSEs multiple times is hard on both them and the school or college. It is my experience that after failing the first resit a large proportion of students then continue to fail subsequent resits, often by the same small factor. This reinforces the students feeling of failure and convinces the student that he/she cannot do Mathematics and provides a barrier to progressing to the 'pass standard'."*

*"Studying an alternative option to GCSE gives the student a fresh start. It is a chance to break the cycle of failure and give the student fresh optimism and confidence."*

**ENDS**

**Notes to editors:**

Other key statistics of interest

- 64% of respondents aged 16-24 say they don't have (or didn't have) as much information at school on vocational / technical routes as they do / did about academic routes of education.
- Over a half (53%) of respondents who are currently doing GCSEs say that sitting their GCSEs is the most stressful time during their teenage years with almost 3 in 5 (57%) of respondents who are doing A levels agreeing with this.
- 7 in 10 (71%) of business owners also agree that Maths and English qualifications should be applied to everyday life.

About NCFE

NCFE is a national Awarding Organisation which is passionate about designing, developing and certificating diverse, nationally recognised qualifications and awards.

In 2015, NCFE became the parent body of Awarding Organisations CACHE, which specialises in qualifications for learners in the early years, childcare and health and social care sectors. In 2016,

Cache launched the Save Our Early Years (SOEY) campaign which called on the Government to reinstate Functional Skills as a viable qualification for Level 3 Early Year Practitioners.

Following this success, the awarding body has once again called on the Government with #FullyFunctional to recognise the viability of functional skills as an alternative qualification to English and Maths GCSEs if learners struggle to pass their GCSEs first time and achieve Grade 3.

Functional Skills qualifications combine the essential elements of English, mathematics and ICT that individuals need to enable them to engage successfully as citizens and progress to further learning or employment. Functional English, mathematics and ICT help learners reinforce skills in communication, problem solving, listening, time management and team working.

The research was conducted by Censuswide, with 2,011 General Respondents aged 16+ in UK between 13.03.2019 - 14.03.2019. The survey was conducted from a nationally representative sample of UK adults. Quotas were applied to nationally representative proportions for age, gender and region. Censuswide abide by and employ members of the Market Research Society which is based on the ESOMAR principles.