

Skills for Life and Key Skills qualifications

In 1998 the Government asked Sir Claus Moser (Chairman of the Basic Skills Agency) to lead a Working Group to make recommendations on how to tackle basic literacy and numeracy problems noted among the adult population. This work formed the [Skills for Life Strategy](#), which was mainly targeted at re-engaging and developing the literacy and numeracy skills among adults no longer in full or part time education. Separately, the Dearing Review of qualifications for 16-19 year olds (1996), led to the development of Key Skills qualifications to tackle employer concerns that young people were arriving in the workplace without the ability to effectively apply their English, Maths and ICT skills.

In 2000, the Qualifications and Curriculum Agency (QCA), the Basic Skills Agency and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) published [National Standards for Adult Literacy and Numeracy](#). These Standards formed the basis of national qualifications in adult literacy and numeracy. These included national adult literacy and numeracy certificates aligned to the new key skills qualifications in 'Communication' and 'Application of Number' –at levels 1-4 of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Adult Literacy and Numeracy core curricula were subsequently developed to support delivery of the new adult literacy and numeracy qualifications.

Development of Functional Skills Standards and Qualifications

In 2007, QCA began work to converge Skills for Life and Key Skills qualifications, which were seen by Government as being largely successful. The purpose of the new qualifications was to prepare learners to apply effectively their maths and English skills, (which may have been acquired through another qualification, such as GCSE) for the purpose of their career and employment. Draft [Functional Skills Standards](#) were developed and the resulting qualifications were nationally piloted between 2007 and 2010. The three year pilot activity evaluated by [Tribal](#) included all delivery routes - 14-19 Diplomas (shelved in 2010), GCSE, Apprenticeships, Foundation Learning, work-based learning, and other adult contexts across schools, sixth form and further education colleges, workplaces, adult centres, custodial settings and training providers - prior to the qualifications being fully rolled out from September 2010.

Link between Functional Skills and GCSEs

Originally, QCA was asked by Government to make the achievement of the new qualifications a condition of awarding GCSEs at Grades A-C. The intention was that no candidate would be able to achieve GCSE English or Maths at Grade A*-C unless they had also achieved the equivalent Functional Skills qualification at level 2. At a fairly late stage of piloting, Ofqual ruled that the proposed GCSE hurdle was unworkable. Instead, 'functional elements' were intended for incorporation into the GCSEs.

Replacement of Key Skills by Functional Skills

Around 2010/11, activity started, as was always intended, to gradually replace Key Skills qualifications by Functional Skills qualifications within Apprenticeships.

The final Functional Skills qualifications and their assessments are based on a number of documents:

- [The \(qualifications\) criteria for Functional Skills qualifications \(Ofqual\)](#)
- Functional Skills (subject) criteria for [English](#), [Maths](#) and [ICT \(separate/Ofqual\)](#)
- [Controlled assessment regulations for Functional Skills \(Ofqual\)](#).

Audience and take-up

As well as being used for apprenticeships, and as free-standing qualifications, functional skills qualifications are now widely used in adult education. Government funding is available, including for school pupils, apprentices and adult learners. Functional skills qualifications represent around 7 per cent of all regulated qualifications taken in England and, outside GCSEs, are the highest volume qualification types that Ofqual regulates.

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