



Qualifications and
Curriculum Authority

Report of Consultation on Draft Functional Skills standards January to May 2006

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Executive Summary

The findings from the consultation activities undertaken by QCA, CBI and e-skills uk, show general satisfaction with the content of the standards. Many of the participants noted that the draft standards had been mapped to current provision in the National Curriculum, Skills for Life qualifications, GCSEs and key skills qualifications this and noted that this was a helpful starting point.

The standards have been revised in the light of the comments received. It may be that some of the comments raised in the responses will be addressed further down the line when the qualifications specifications and assessment models are developed for pilots.

All three consultations provided a consistent message about the need for:

- a clearer explanation of levels,
- clarity and specificity of language throughout the standards
- a clearer definition of the progression between levels
- clarity about who the standards were aimed at
- more examples of 'application' of the skills – 'real skills' for 'real world' situations

Employers also felt that communication, social, and interpersonal skills were critically important, as were team working, common sense and confidence. The QCA consultation respondents were particularly concerned that the wider key skills should be maintained.

Functional skills will impact directly on the design and awarding of GCSEs in English, maths and ICT and are planned to replace, in time, the Adult Numeracy, Adult Literacy and key skills qualifications in England and this was felt to be of concern. In relation to GCSEs, many respondents felt that it should be accepted that the achievements in GCSEs would drop with the introduction of a level 2 Functional Skills hurdle or requirement.

A further concern expressed by respondents in relation to access and DDA compliance was that further thought needs to be given about how the new Functional Skills qualifications are constructed and about the impact of the proposed Functional Skills hurdle for candidates with special requirements. A more flexible structure to the qualification, a real option to just achieve GCSE or functional skills and a choice of assessment models were noted as positive ways forward to assist the passage for candidates with special needs.

1. Introduction

QCA has the remit to develop functional skills qualifications in English, maths and ICT. The remit for this work is as a result of two Government White Papers, the *Skills White Paper* and the *14 – 19 Education and Skills White Paper* (both 2005). The recommendation to develop functional mathematics was also included in the Smith report *Making Maths Count* (2005).

The development of functional skills is a key feature of the 11-19 education reform programme, and includes: the revision of GCSE criteria; the development of the “extended project”; the review of Key Stage 3, and the development of the Specialised Diploma. Functional Skills qualification development impacts across all of these reforms.

The current proposals for functional skills developments will impact directly on the design and awarding of GCSEs in English, maths and ICT and are planned to replace, in time, the Adult Numeracy, Adult Literacy and key skills qualifications of Application of Number, Communication and ICT in England. These two aspects - the impact on GCSEs and on existing qualifications that functional skills will replace - require the work to be carried out in close consultation with QCA's regulatory partners in Wales (DELLS) and Northern Ireland (CCEA). Both these organisations carried out consultation activities on the proposed functional skills standards and QCA is committed to working with them in the design and development of Functional Skills qualifications.

2. QCA Consultation

i) Methodology

a. QCA Workshops

QCA organised three consultation activities towards the end of 2005 in order to engage key partners and organisations in consultation on the initial work of the development of functional skills.

From February to May 2006, QCA conducted a wide consultation on the content of draft standards to underpin qualification development in the three functional skills areas. The consultations included face to face meetings, workshops and circulation of documents to key stakeholders.

Three consultation workshops were held in February and March 2006. A further event was organised at the end of the consultation period because of the large demand from practitioners and others to be involved and to accommodate those unable to attend previous events.

At the workshops, participants were introduced to the draft standards and asked questions about the coverage, level of demand, and progression. The questions mirrored those asked in the web-based consultation (see below) but were provided to small groups for discussion and debate. The majority of the participants at the workshops were from colleges and adult education. Schools were represented but in a minority. QCA therefore undertook some further consultation activities aimed specifically at schools.

CCEA and DELLS consultations

CCEA and DELLS both ran consultation workshops that had a similar form to those run by QCA. Both events elicited a level of discomfort with the standards. Maths in particular was thought by the CCEA consultation event to be presented in a way that was difficult to access, and the standards were thought to be too difficult. DELLS' event raised similar issues, but also significant concern over the titling of "functional English". The current key skill in communication can be taken in English or Welsh. Also, as the standards cover reading, writing, listening and speaking, the title 'Communication' was thought to be more appropriate. The full reports from both events are available.

b. QCA web-based consultation

QCA conducted a web-based consultation through the QCA website. The consultation was live for the month of March 2006. The web-based consultation received nearly 2,000 responses from submitted questionnaires. Many of the responses provided expanded comments in addition to the

questionnaire responses. The largest group of respondents to the web consultation were from schools.

The broad messages from the web-based consultation included the following:

- different assessment methods will produce different evidence and therefore have different purposes;
- assessment should provide evidence of ability to apply;
- tests provide a rigorous form of assessment and (according to our consultation) give most validity;
- some students do not perform well in tests;
- tests do not provide evidence of application;
- portfolios do not necessarily reflect the candidates own work;
- candidates like portfolios because they can see their own development
- portfolios give evidence of the application of skills;
- portfolios present a heavy workload for teachers
- tasks offer a good way of testing specific skills in context;
- key skills assessment is working well;
- key skills assessment is not working well;
- there should be a range of options for assessment;
- assessment should vary according to level.

Participants were provided with background information about the development of functional skills, an explanation of standards development, an outline of the process and the draft standards. The questionnaire covered the content of the standards and asked for an indication of respondents' views about assessment.

Respondents were asked if:

- the standards supported the agreed definitions for each functional skill area;
- the language was clear;
- the format was correct;
- all the skills and knowledge that had been included were appropriate for each subject area and if there were any that were missing;
- the level of demand at each level was correct.

Respondents were also asked if they felt that the standards would enable progression both within functional skills and beyond and, if they felt that functional skills development and assessment should be embedded into other parts of a learning programme or developed and assessed as “stand alone” activity.

ii. Findings by subject

Draft Standards – general comments

The findings from the QCA consultation showed general satisfaction with the content of the standards. The draft standards had been mapped to current provision in the National Curriculum, Skills for Life qualifications, GCSEs and key skills qualifications. Many of the participants noted this and noted that for the most part what had been drafted had drawn helpfully from existing provision.

The standards were each presented in slightly different ways, reflecting differences between the three subjects (maths was different in format to English and ICT).

Generally, participants thought that the language quite clear or very clear (92% for English, 84% for maths and 91% for ICT). In general respondents thought that the format of the standards was quite clear or very clear (94% for English, 87% for maths and 92% for ICT).

Most participants felt that the draft standards met the definitions for each subject area (84.5% for English, 73% for maths and 80% for ICT). Respondents at the workshops felt that they would want to see a full set of standards up to level 4, but particularly at level 3, in order to comment on the level 2. Because it is planned that the Functional Skills will replace the key skills, concern was also expressed at the absence of the wider key skills from the consultation.

From workshops in England and the web consultation it was clear that the current key skills portfolio assessment should be avoided. This is not the response from Wales where the portfolio approach has been widely and successfully adopted.

Support was divided across the three assessment options (test, task, portfolio). For each subject the largest group of respondents favoured a task supported by one of the other forms of assessment (English 56%, maths 47% and ICT 55%). It should be noted that 47% of maths respondents also opted for a test supported by one of the other assessment options.

From the consultation events, many delegates felt that a task could be either supervised and controlled, or run more flexibly. It was seen by many as providing a way of allowing learners to apply their knowledge in a way that might be contextualised to ensure meaning to the learner.

a. Specific comments on functional English – standards and assessment

The majority of respondents thought that the language used by the English Standards was clear (92%), although certain terms used were felt to require definition. A small number of respondents commented that differentiation between the levels was not always clear.

The vast majority of respondents thought that the English Standards incorporated all the appropriate skills (84%) and were at the right level of demand (81%). Around a quarter of respondents thought that some skills development was missing from the standards.

Discussion of the assessment of functional English reflected a consensus that this should reflect purposeful, real life activity and the importance of covering spoken communication and extended writing as well as the more “easily assessable” elements of the subject.

Respondents to the consultation were asked to select the most appropriate form of assessment for functional English. Only small numbers of respondents supported a single form of assessment, the largest of which was 13% of respondents who selected “task. More than two thirds of respondents selected “task” (69%), either on its own or supported by another form of assessment, with one fifth of respondents selecting test and task (21%).

Less than two thirds of respondents felt that tests might form part of the assessment for functional (63%). Portfolio was the least popular assessment option with 56% mentioning it and only 7% supporting it as the sole method of assessment.

At consultation events and through the web based consultation a strong message was delivered about the use of the “English” in the subjects’ title (see also comments from DELLS consultation). This was felt to have disability discrimination and language implications but more importantly, did not reflect the important purpose of functional skills in delivering literacy and communications skills.

b. Specific comments on functional mathematics – standards and assessment

Most respondents liked the format of these standards (87% found them very clear or quite clear). A few respondents to the web consultation did not like the format of the maths standards. The format, which puts the process at the heart of the standards, was well received particularly at the workshops although some respondents said that the standards should be written with process in mind, but thought they had not been. Some respondents thought that the mathematics identified was “hard”, but acknowledged this was a common problem with all mathematics qualifications (18%). Many of those familiar with application of number key skill and Skills for Life numeracy qualifications could see the map to these qualifications but thought that the addition of detail from the National Curriculum

would be alien to some practitioners. There was some detailed comment about particular use of language (“present” is used with more than one meaning in the standards) and there is sometimes use of technical and mathematical language, which many felt was inaccessible.

In the workshops, several groups commented that there was seen by some to be a “jump” from level 1 to level 2. In the web consultation 85% thought the progression up to the next level was right. The comment on the ‘jump’ might in part relate to the references to the National Curriculum at these levels (level 1 mapped to NC level 4, but level 2 mapped to NC level 5 and 6), but it was felt by some to exist also in current mathematics qualifications. There were several detailed comments received on the draft standards including a very helpful paper, which provided comment from the Shell Team at University of Nottingham. This included comment and suggestions about the standards and assessment. Nottingham commented that the format of the maths standards did not provide sufficient information to differentiate between the levels and this was supported in other comments received. Many of the general comments received will be useful in the next stage of development, in shaping qualifications.

As with the other subjects, there was no majority in favour of a single form of assessment. The largest group selecting a single form of assessment opted for ‘test only’ (23%). Nearly half of respondents favoured either a task or a task supported by another form of assessment (both 47%). The way in which a task could be taken was considered by some as unimportant. Whether controlled, timed, supervised or more flexibly delivered, all were considered valid.

At the workshops a system that provided a bank of tasks, that could relate better to different contexts and ages of learners was considered a good way to ensure engagement, motivation, interest and relevance. Some felt that there would also be a need to undertake a knowledge test, either attached to the task or taken separately. A move away from portfolios and the difficulties of assembling them was welcomed by most particularly in the workshops in England. Some asked that learning styles at least, if not assessment, should encourage evidence collection.

c. Specific comments on functional ICT – standards and assessment

These standards were felt, by some respondents, to be over-specified and to not capture the “process” that is seen as inherent in these functional skills. Most respondents were familiar with the concept of applying the skills and felt that the ICT standards could capture this application better.

There was some comment that the standards focused on the practical use of ICT rather than on gaining knowledge and understanding and that there is repetition and overlap in content. In terms of the clarity of the language, 91% of respondents felt that the standards were very clear or quite clear. Respondents felt that there was some lack of clarity about the status of items given as examples

(e.g.) and those given as an 'i.e.'. They were unsure as to whether the use of 'i.e.' was restricting the possibilities in that instance.

Most respondents liked the format of these standards (92%). In response to whether the draft standards incorporated all the appropriate skills, the most commonly raised issue for the ICT standards was the need for 'future-proofing'. Respondents referred to the pace of change and the need to move away from specific items such as spreadsheets and word-processing to more generic skills.

Several respondents felt that there should be more emphasis on raising awareness of security issues, such as virus protection, use of passwords and backing up data. A few also raised issues such as responding appropriately to on-line communications and ethical use of ICT in the workplace. There was also comment about the need for security of information and information sources and the need for discrimination when using sources and communicating. The need for basic awareness of how to avoid risks and protect personal information was also raised as an issue.

Other suggestions included: compressing files, uninstalling software, troubleshooting and problem solving, editing file templates and (at level 1 and 2) knowledge of networks. In response to the question about level of demand, for ICT the same number of respondents found the standards too demanding as found them not demanding enough. From the web-based consultation, 78% stated that the level of demand was about right.

Where respondents made general comments about the standards, the most frequently recurring comment was that further guidance was needed to clarify the standards. These respondents felt unable to comment on the level without further clarification of the standards.

The next most commonly raised point was that the appropriateness of the level depends on who is the target audience for the standards. Respondents commented on the diversity of learners, mentioning adult learners, who might have lower ICT skills than school leavers, those with special needs and E2E level learners.

Those making comments about the ICT standards again made comparisons with other standards, such as the National Curriculum, the National Occupational Standards, the ITQ and Skills for Life. As previously stated, there were mixed feelings about whether the standards were too demanding or not demanding enough. Some suggested moving some skills up or down a level. A small group thought that level 2 was too demanding and contained some level 3 skills. In general however, at the workshop events, respondents felt that a review of level content was required for particular skills. 71% felt that there was no knowledge development missing from the standards. There was some suggestion that evaluating fitness for purpose for audience needed to be added. Other suggestions included system life cycle, assessing the accuracy of information on the Internet and use of ICT for

problem solving. The need to include problem solving as part of the overall process was seen as particularly important by workshop attendees reflecting comments also made about mathematics.

Where respondents made comments about whether there was any skills development missing from the ICT standards, 79% responding to the web-based consultation said not. Several respondents suggested skills related to multimedia presentations and websites such as hyperlinks, hotspots and slide transitions were needed. A few respondents suggested problem solving, including modelling and investigating hypotheses. A third suggestion made by more than one respondent related to making judgements about sources of information. Other suggestions included hardware configuration, spell checking and grammar checking, printing and print choices, using USB devices, and photo and video editing.

As with the other subjects, there were low levels of support for a single form of assessment. The most popular single assessment options were task or portfolio (both 13%). Of the combined approaches to assessment, marginally the most popular was a task in conjunction with another form of assessment, selected by over half those responding (55%). Slightly smaller numbers of respondents mentioned test and portfolio in conjunction with another form of assessment (48% and 45%, respectively).

3. Employer and sector consultations

i) CBI

a. Methodology

The CBI consultation did not use the draft standards, but asked employers what they were expecting from young people who might be prepared in the basics or functional elements of English and Mathematics. ICT did not feature in the scope of the CBI consultation. Telephone interviews were used to elicit responses.

b. Findings

The CBI findings presented employer expectations from functional skills and did not explicitly reference the draft functional skills standards. The CBI consulted about basic numeracy and literacy skills, and did not include ICT skills in their consultation.

For basic literacy, the CBI found that broadly employers wanted people who could read and write and use spelling, grammar and punctuation correctly. The five main things that employers wanted from functional skills in English were:

- written communication (with a specific reference to handwriting)
- communicating information orally
- understanding written instructions
- grammar and spelling
- formal correspondence conventions

The basic requirements outlined here are covered in the draft functional skills standards. However in addition legible handwriting was thought to be a key requirement by employers (for instance for filling in an accident report form). This is an area that will need careful consideration with reference to DDA compliance if included explicitly within the standards. The CBI consultation showed that employers wanted basic numeracy skills, and for learners to be able to do simple sums and estimations with and without the use of a calculator. They wanted learners to be able to reason and problem solve. The five main things that employers wanted from functional skills in mathematics were:

- being able to do simple mental arithmetic without a calculator
- data interpretation
- using measures
- percentages and proportions
- using and applying formulae

In general, the CBI response was supportive of the development and articulated the real concerns and aspirations of their constituency in this area. The CBI remains concerned however that the development of functional skills qualifications in themselves may not produce the change that is

needed and it will be important at each stage of this development to work with the CBI and others to evaluate the real effectiveness of this development for improving young peoples and adult functional skills acquisition.

e-skills uk

a. Methodology

The *e-skills uk* consultation did use all three sets of the draft Functional Skills standards. For mathematics, SEMTA provided “can do” statements, which were a translation of the draft standards to a form that SEMTA felt employers would relate to more readily. The *e-skills uk* consultation found that employers welcomed the proposal for the development of Functional Skills. The majority of employers felt that the detailed skills specified in the new standards for ICT, English, and mathematics are all important and there were no skills specified that employers did not think were important.

Employers had more comments about the mathematics standards than the English and ICT standards.

b. Findings

The main comments on individual subjects included the need for more attention to:

- **Functional ICT:** use of specific applications, programming, security of systems and information and understanding of data protection and copyright issues.
- **Functional English:** grammar and punctuation. Also, producing legible handwriting is seen to be a crucial element.
- **Functional Maths:** mental arithmetic - which should be distinguished from use of calculators – and basic numeracy.

Employers also felt that communication skills, social skills, and interpersonal skills were important, as were team working, common sense and confidence.

The findings from employers supported *e-skills uk* further consultation with SSCs and Diploma Development Partnerships¹. The most common concerns expressed in the *e-skills uk* consultations included:

- **Differentiation and progression:** it was hard to understand the differentiation and progression between levels

¹ Diploma Development Partnerships responsible for developing the new specialised diplomas for 14 to 19 year olds

- **Terminology:** terminology of levels was confusing, for instance the three Entry levels. There is a need to clarify how the levels relate to GCSE achievement and some examples of what levels employees in particular jobs should be
- **Clarity:** The degree of clarity and precision of the language was often open to interpretation and not employer-friendly
- **Consistency:** In the case of Maths, employers would want to see learning outcomes (when developed) look consistent with ICT and English
- **Durability:** The shelf life of the standards was a particular concern for ICT

The consultation identified some recommendations from employers:

ICT

- The proposed draft standards are introduced.
- Programming skills should be included in the standards at Level 2.
- More emphasis should be placed on system security management, copyright and data protection/use of data issues.
- Thought needs to be given as to how to reflect the requirement for ethical use of information and adherence to company protocols and policy.

English

- The proposed standards are introduced.
- The final standards place a greater emphasis on grammar, spelling, punctuation and speaking and listening skills.
- The legibility of handwriting is critical and this should be reflected in the standards and considered when assessment methods are being designed.
- There is a need for more work-related examples with clear indication of what a graduate of the functional skills can actually perform.
- The standards should include broad 'communication skills' as well as specific language skills.
- The language needs to be simplified in places.

Mathematics

- The proposed standards are introduced.
- The final mathematics standards place a stronger emphasis on performing mental arithmetic and that use of a calculator is not included under a single standard.
- Basic numeracy, including the use of fractions, decimals and percentages, needs to be emphasised.
- The final functional mathematics qualifications need to include clear learning outcomes as with English and ICT.

General comment on school leavers' skills:

- 60% of employers thought ICT skills were either important or very important and 80% thought these skills were never or almost never lacking;

- 48% of employers thought mathematics skills were important, very important or essential for school leavers with GCSE qualifications or equivalent. 28% of respondents said mathematics skills were sometimes, frequently or nearly always lacking in school leavers;
- The majority of respondents (70%) said speaking and listening skills were sometimes, frequently or nearly always lacking in this group, followed by writing skills (65%) and by reading skills (47%) lacking in young people with few or no qualifications.

Crosscutting issues

Employers recommended that:

- There should be a clearer explanation of levels.
- There should be a clearer definition of the progression between levels and explicit information on what a person, who has attained a particular level, can actually do.
- Attention should be paid to clarity and specificity of language throughout the standards.

4. Wales and Northern Ireland

i) Wales

The detailed response from the Wales event provided comment relating to each of the standards. The Welsh consultation raised the following general points;

- Delegates had serious reservations about the inclusion of Functional Skills in GCSEs in English, Welsh, Maths and ICT. It was thought that this would detract both from the functionality of the standards and from the validity of assessment.
- The Welsh workshop was concerned at the loss of flexibility in the use of both Welsh and English in teaching and learning, and in the assessment of candidates' work, if two separate qualifications replace the current Key Skill Communication.
- Most delegates favoured building on the expertise in Basic and Key Skills that has developed in Wales in recent years by converging these qualifications, and argued that any shortcomings of the GCSEs should be addressed separately.
- Most delegates felt that Functional Skills, if developed, should be available both as stand-alone qualifications and, where appropriate, as an integral part of other (normally vocational) qualifications, possibly including Applied GCSEs.
- All delegates took the view that it is not possible to consider the fitness for purpose of the draft standards independently of assessment methods. Inevitably, assessment has a major influence on delivery models, teaching and learning styles, application, and contextualisation, all of which are key to fitness for purpose.

ii) Northern Ireland

The response from the Northern Ireland event provided key points to address in redrafting of the standards. The summary points were;

- The proposal to include functional skills within GCSEs has the potential for employers to view the stand alone qualification as merely a 'part of' a GCSE. There was some general concern expressed over the use of ICT in the definitions in the maths and English standards and the level of literacy and numeracy required in the ICT standards
- It was emphasised that the assessment of the functional skills should not compromise their teaching, particularly within the broader GCSE contexts of skills. Assessment of functional skills should be practical in nature and should enable evidence of competence to be demonstrated.
- In general the format of the draft functional skills standards is a big improvement on the format of the Key Skills standards. However, there was some comment on the maths standards-they were considered to be written in vague terms and were structured differently to the ICT and English standards. It was agreed that all standards should be consistent in presentation. Functional skills should be a development of existing skills standards. This would support the work already done in Northern Ireland with essential skills.
- The term 'functional' may not be suitable as a 'brand' name for this new development-private and public sector employers and other users should be consulted at an early stage on the 'branding' for the skills.
- There should be clear links with skills development at Key stage 3 (and earlier key stages). Functional Skills should be integrated/assessed in all subject areas.

5. Overall Analysis of three consultations

Many respondents commented that the draft standards were based on existing key skills and Skills for Life qualifications and wondered why therefore there was a need to change. Many people said that key skills were now just beginning to be understood more widely and that achievement rates were now much better. However, respondents did see an opportunity to improve the assessment for Skills for Life qualifications and reduce the assessment burden for key skills qualifications.

There are some conflicting views from the three consultations. Employers responding to the e-skills and CBI consultations recommended that writing skills should be covered by the standards whereas this was not raised in the QCA consultation. Although the employers placed emphasis on the use of mental arithmetic without a calculator, this was not raised in the QCA consultation.

The functional ICT standards were felt by respondents to be over-specified and to not capture the “process” that is seen as inherent in these functional skills. Most respondents were familiar with the concept of applying the skills and felt that the ICT standards could capture this application better.

All three consultations provided a consistent message about the need for:

- a clearer explanation of levels,
- clarity and specificity of language throughout the standards
- a clearer definition of the progression between levels
- clarity about who the standards were aimed at
- more examples of application of the skills

Employers also felt that communication skills, social skills, and interpersonal skills were important, as were team working, common sense and confidence. The QCA consultation respondents were particularly concerned that the wider key skills should be maintained.

Functional skills will impact directly on the design and awarding of GCSEs in English, maths and ICT and are planned to replace, in time, the Adult Numeracy, Adult Literacy and key skills qualifications in England. In relation to GCSEs, many respondents felt that it should be accepted that the achievements in GCSEs would drop with the introduction of a level 2 Functional Skills hurdle or requirement.

Respondents commented in particular that the title “functional *English*” was wrong. There are two aspects to this. Firstly the use of “English” was felt to be a barrier to access for candidates who need

to use alternative forms of communication such as British Sign Language. Secondly, currently key skill communication can be taken in English or Welsh.

A further concern expressed by respondents in relation to access and DDA compliance was that further thought needs to be given about how the new functional skills qualifications are constructed, the design of assessments, and the impact of the proposed functional skills hurdle for candidates with special requirements. Current guidance is that it may be more appropriate for candidates with special requirements to take a GCSE rather than a key skill (where they may not be able to meet certain assessment criteria). The proposed level 2 functional skills "hurdle" / requirement for GCSE removes this option and this could therefore act as a barrier to achievement of grades A* - C for certain candidates. A more flexible structure to the qualification, a real option to just achieve GCSE or Level 2 Functional Skills and a choice of assessment models would certainly assist the passage for candidates with special needs.

6. Conclusions

i) Standards

a. The draft English standards and assessment

The QCA consultation identified that most respondents felt that the title for this functional skill is inappropriate. Consideration will need to be given to a title (communication / literacy) other than English. Particularly with functional English, there are special needs issues, and there is a need to consider British Sign Language and Braille as “non-English” ways of communicating. These issues have been addressed, worked on, and resolved in some measure through the current SfL and key skills qualifications. The DDA issues and the need to ensure that learner achievement can be acknowledged will require consideration of assessment design and structure to cover Speaking, Listening, Reading, Writing.

b. The draft Maths standards and assessment

The “process format” of the standards was seen to be particularly helpful by most respondents. Some of the technical mathematical language will be revised and consideration will be given to the apparent “jump” from level 1 to level 2 in revising the draft standards. Many of the comments will need to be addressed at the qualification specification stage of the process rather than in the standards themselves.

In relation to assessment, most people felt that Maths lends itself well to a “problem solving” task. This could include some initial preparation or material given in advance, with a task to be completed under controlled, supervised conditions. Some knowledge-based questions could also be asked as a stand-alone test or as part of the assessment. Some felt that a task could include a very slim “portfolio” that would be a task that was completed in the candidate’s own time and internally verified. Respondents noted that e-assessment should be exploited in the development of assessment approaches.

c. The draft ICT standards and assessment

These standards were felt to be over-specified, and to not capture the “process” that is seen as inherent in these Functional Skills. Most respondents were familiar with the concept of applying the skills and felt that the ICT standards could capture this application better.

There was some comment that the standards focused on the practical use of ICT rather than on gaining knowledge and understanding and that there was repetition and overlap in content.

Respondents referred to the pace of change (future proofing) and the need to move away from specific items such as spreadsheets and word-processing to defining generic ICT skills. The need to include problem solving ability as part of the overall process was seen as particularly important by workshop attendees.

There were low levels of support for a single form of assessment. The most popular single assessment options were task or portfolio. Of the combined approaches to assessment, marginally the most popular was a task in conjunction with another form of assessment, selected by over half those responding. Again respondents noted that e-assessment should be exploited in the development of assessment approaches. At some of the events the Key Stage 3 ICT test was suggested as a possible model for the assessment of functional ICT.

ii) General issues

a. Assessment models

The introduction of Functional Skills is likely to change the assessment model from that currently used for SfL qualifications. SfL learners currently undertake (at levels 1 and 2) a multiple choice question paper for assessment purposes. Different assessment demands for SfL candidates are likely to be required and SfL candidates who will need to be prepared for Functional Skills assessment when these new qualifications are may have to undertake more in the way of assessment than a multiple choice test. An additional consideration is that a move away from machine markable assessment would affect the facility for these candidates to receive instant feedback on their performance in the assessment.

SfL candidates at entry level can achieve in different skill areas at different levels in literacy. There will be a need to ensure that this “spiky profile” approach which is widely supported at entry level is retained. Separate assessments particularly for reading / writing and speaking and listening will be needed at entry level and consideration will need to be given to whether separate assessment of speaking and listening and for reading and writing is extended up to level 2.

b. Comments on use of test, task or portfolio

Those consulted wanted QCA to ensure that the trialling of Functional Skills with GCSE and as a freestanding qualification is a coherent exercise. Some felt concerned that the spirit of the current key skills (applied, competence based assessment) should not be lost in the requirement to accommodate GCSE programmes. Many of the people in the workshops felt that the difficulties of portfolio assessment had been overcome and we should consider keeping it especially colleagues where the portfolio approach has been successfully adopted. A slimmer version of a portfolio than is currently required for key skills, could solve some of the problems for candidates with particular requirements and could be useful for candidates who respond much better to a continuous form of assessment rather than an end test.

Support was divided across the three assessment options (test, task, portfolio). For each subject the largest group of respondents favoured a task supported by one of the other forms of assessment (English 56%, maths 47% and ICT 55%).

From the consultation events, many delegates felt that a task could be either supervised and controlled, or more flexible. A task was seen by many as providing a way of allowing learners to apply their knowledge in a way that might be contextualised to ensure meaning to the learner.

Planned activity on functional skills development is a test and trial period to assess the standards in the context of developing assessment models. Further revisions to the standards may therefore be required as a result of the trialling. Work will then commence to prepare for the piloting of Functional Skills qualifications from September 2007. Preparation will include having confirmed standards to allow for the development of qualifications in Functional Skills, assessments, and guidance and support material to allow awarding bodies to submit for accreditation to run the pilots. Once the trialling has been conducted and evaluation carried out, QCA will provide advice on the assessment model for Functional Skills.

c. Areas for further work

Progression to higher levels - levels 3 and 4

Many respondents felt that if functional skills are to replace SfL and key skills qualifications there should be draft standards to cover all levels to level 4, and felt hampered in their ability to comment on the level 2 standards as they consider that what is in level 2 influences level 3 content and vice versa. There was seen to be a need for level 3 particularly for Specialised Diplomas and in Apprenticeships.

Relationship with GCSE and potential drop in achievements of GCSEs

Many respondents expressed concern about the impact of the proposed hurdle/requirement for level 2 functional skills on GCSE achievement rates.

Maintenance of existing provision

Many respondents wanted re-assurance that existing provision would remain for some time to meet the needs of PSA and achievement targets but also to ensure certificated outcomes of qualifications particularly for the entry level and level 1 candidates.

Respondents asked about the future of the wider key skills and the full range of levels currently available. Functional Skills was said to “replace key skills” but it only covers three areas of key skills not the six, and currently only to level 2. Questions were asked about what will happen beyond level 2 and whether wider key skills will be kept.

Many respondents wanted a revision of the current qualifications in SfL, key skills and GCSEs, rather than the introduction of something new. Qualification development was seen as being of less importance than new approaches to teaching and learning to ensure application.

Who should teach Functional Skills?

Many people expressed concern about teachers of the subject areas who would be required to teach functional skills. Staff development was felt to be a critical issue for the success of this development. Awarding bodies, centres, learners will all need time to plan and prepare. Another question asked by many was whether there would be help as now from agencies such as the Key Skills Support Programme.

Disability Discrimination Act requirements

The issue of difficulties for candidates with special needs is a constant one and there are aspects of the existing system (key skills) where candidates are advised not to undertake the qualifications, as they will not be able to achieve aspects of it. This most commonly applies to the Communication key skill. Aspects of the potential difficulties are mirrored in the requirements for speaking and listening as well as reading and writing for the Functional English (see note on this under Functional English above).

The title of the qualifications

There was little support for the title “functional” – most thought it an unattractive word and thought that young people in particular would shorten the word. Others, who thought there was a critical need for a full set of qualifications from entry to level 4, felt that at higher levels in particular the title was inappropriate, although the qualification would be valid.

Continuing professional development

Continuing professional development was raised as important by most of the respondents. There seemed to be general agreement that there should be consideration of a training package for all, to ensure that teachers know what is required prior to Sept 2009.

The consultation highlighted that the CPD issues are very different depending on the learner. Skills for Life teachers have to undertake specific qualifications to teach basic skills learners. Key skills assessors however, are currently not required to hold any specific qualifications. GCSE teachers

have their own set of professional qualifications. Should there be one requirement for all Functional Skills teachers, or should the learner group dictate what qualifications a teacher /assessor should have?

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