

English and Maths Functional Skills Guidance for Employers

What are Functional Skills?

Functional skills are the fundamental, applied skills in English and mathematics which help people to gain the most from life, learning and working.

Functional skills qualifications are available in English, ICT and mathematics at the following levels: Entry 1, Entry 2, Entry 3, level 1 and level 2. Each qualification is separate and assessed independently.

Functional skills form part of all apprenticeship frameworks and all new apprenticeship standards – although learners who already have obtained the level required by the apprenticeship will be exempt from undertaking them.

Levels explained

The new GCSEs have a 9 to 1 grading scale to replace A* to G, with 9 being the highest grade.

A grade 4 or above marks a similar achievement to the old grade C or above, the standard for a level 2 qualification.

The Department for Education recognises grade 4 and above as a ‘standard pass’ in all subjects. It is a credible achievement for a young person that should be valued as a passport to future study and employment. Students who do not hold a grade 4 or above in English and maths must continue to study these subjects as part of their post-16 education; apprentices would undertake functional skills as part of their apprenticeship program to achieve level 4 or above in English and/or Maths if they had not already obtained this level at GCSE.

GCSE Grading	
New Grading Structure	Old Grading Structure
9	A*
8	A
7	B
6	C
5	D
4	E
3	F
2	G
1	U
Standard Pass → 4	U

Functional Skills are equivalent to GCSE's, the table below shows the comparison:

Entry level	GCSE below G or level 1
Level 1	GCSE D-G or level 1-3
Level 2	GCSE A* - C or level 4-9



Functional Skills Exemptions

The Department for Education (DFE) treat some qualifications in math's, English language and literature as equivalent to GCSE grade 9 to 4 or A* to C. This means that students who already hold the below qualifications may not need to undertake the English and/or math's functional skills element of the apprenticeship; but you need to check this against each apprenticeship standard to be sure:

- international GCSEs, regulated or unregulated, or equivalent level 1/level 2 certificates grade A* to C/9 to 4
- GCSEs grade A* to C, obtained in Wales, including maths numeracy
- GCSEs grade A* to C, obtained in Northern Ireland
- Scottish Intermediate 2 certificates grade A to C
- Scottish Standard Grades (credit level) grade 1 to 2
- Scottish National 5 certificates grade A to C
- international O levels grade A* to C
- A and AS levels at any pass grade
- full International Baccalaureate (IB) level 3 Diploma (LARS reference 50034157)
- International Baccalaureate Certificate in maths
- core math's qualifications at level 3

International GCSEs

International GCSEs, regulated or unregulated, or equivalent level 1/level 2 certificates in maths and English all count as equivalent to GCSEs for the purposes of recognising prior attainment.

Students who hold these qualifications in maths and English at GCSE grade 9 to 4 or A* to C will not have to continue their study of these subjects.

Exceptions to the English and Maths for People with Special Educational Needs, Learning Difficulties or Disabilities

Every effort should be made to enable apprentices to achieve the regular minimum English and maths requirements of the specific apprenticeship, including appropriate use of access arrangements, reasonable adjustments and stepping stone qualifications.

However, some apprentices with learning difficulties and disabilities may be able to meet the occupational standard but may struggle to achieve the English or maths qualification at the level normally required as a result of the nature of their difficulty or disability. Apprentices in this category who meet all of the conditions are exempt from the regular English and maths minimum requirements and are instead required to achieve an adjusted minimum requirement of Entry Level 3 in the subjects.

Depending on the apprentice's individual circumstances and assessment, the adjustment may apply to one subject in isolation, or to both English and maths.

How to make sure apprentices are studying the correct level of English and Maths

For those undertaking a **level 3 or higher apprenticeship**, it is a requirement that they should hold or achieve an approved level 2 in both subjects before they can successfully complete the apprenticeship.

For apprentices undertaking a **level 2 apprenticeship**, all apprentices need to work towards level 2 in English and Maths.

Where the apprentice already holds or is assessed at level 1 in English and/or maths they must continue to study and take the test for level 2. They do not need to pass the test for level 2.

For some a level 2 may be difficult to achieve. In these circumstances, the achievement of level 1 English and maths are sufficient for successful completion of their apprenticeship, **except where the framework or standard specifies a higher level of English and/or maths must be achieved.**

You can check the level of English and Maths your apprentice needs to achieve by looking at the standard.

If your apprentice has already achieved the level specified by the assessment plan then they do not need to take the functional skill for that subject.

Access to Higher Education Courses

The [Access to Higher Education Diploma](#) is a qualification which prepares people without traditional qualifications to study at university. Access to HE courses are delivered by colleges in England and Wales and are available in a range of different subjects. Access course often include a GCSE-equivalent qualification in English and/or Maths as part of the programme.

The acceptance of such qualifications for admission to HE depends on the admissions policies of individual HEIs: while HEIs generally accept GCSE-equivalent units/qualifications where they have been involved in the approval of the course, and often accept those approved elsewhere, there can be no guarantee that these qualifications will be accepted unless a HEI explicitly makes such a guarantee.

Such qualifications have no formal status for other purposes, or recognised equivalence outside the context of HE admissions, unless the access course has delivered a **FULL GCSE** alongside the access course. **GCSE units delivered as part of an access course are not equivalent to a full GCSE or functional skill.**

Functional Skills Funding for Apprentices

The ESFA will fund an apprentice to achieve up to an approved level 2 qualification in English and maths where they do not already hold a suitable equivalent qualification.

The ESFA will pay for this at the single rate set by them for each eligible qualification undertaken. It will not be deducted from the employer's apprenticeship service account or require employer co-investment.

For level 2 apprenticeships where level 2 English or maths are not required for the apprenticeship and the apprentice does not already hold acceptable qualifications the ESFA will fund an apprentice to undertake and achieve English and maths qualifications of at least level 1 (functional skills level 1 or GCSE grade E or 2) before they attempt the level 2.

The ESFA will fund functional skills English and/or maths at level 1 or below where it can be shown that the apprentice needs to study at a lower level before being able to achieve their level 2.

Full funding guidance can be found in the [ESFA Funding rules 2018-19](#)