

For the attention of Functional/Key/Essential Skills and/or Skills for Life Co-ordinators and Managers



June 2011

1 Giltspur Street
London
EC1A 9DD
T +44 (0)20 7294 2468
F +44 (0)20 7294 2400
www.cityandguilds.com

Qualifications **Key Skills**
ESOL Skills for Life
Functional Skills
Essential Skills (Northern Ireland)

Number **3638, 3692, 3748, 3800**

Functional Skills assessment conditions: please remember this is not an 'exam'

The Functional Skills qualifications differ considerably from many of their predecessors because all assessment is summative and takes place under supervised conditions. Nevertheless, it's important to understand that these qualifications are about 'doing', and all of the assessments involve working through practical tasks to tackle a problem.

This is explained on page 19 of our Functional Skills **handbook available** on the following web page; www.cityandguilds.com/57605

Functional Skills assessments are **not** subject to the JCQ Instructions for Conducting Examinations. Whilst all assessments must be presented unseen to candidates, this does not need to involve all of the trappings of an examination; indeed an overly formal or restrictive environment may disadvantage candidates.

It might be helpful to think of these assessments as more like a controlled assignment than a traditional examination. Candidates should be able to access any equipment that would normally be available to them and reflect their normal way of working. For example it is perfectly acceptable for candidates undertaking the paper-based FS English Writing assessments to word-process their responses, and FS Mathematics candidates may use a spreadsheet package to generate charts/graphs if they prefer this to hand-drawing them. The front page of each assessment paper contains a list of items candidates will need to complete the assessment successfully, although **this list is not exhaustive**. The only real prohibited items are devices that might enable candidates to collude with third party (eg mobile phones).

Entry level assessments

We have become aware of a couple of instances recently where tutors/assessors were denied access to the live Entry level assessment materials until after they have been sat by candidates. This goes against the spirit of how these assessments are intended to

Every effort has been made to ensure that the information contained in this publication is true and correct at time of going to press. However, City & Guilds products and services are subject to continuous development and improvement and the right is reserved to change Products and services from time to time. City & Guilds cannot accept liability for loss or damage arising from the use of information in this publication. City & Guilds is a registered charity established to promote education and training.

News



The City and Guilds of London Institute
Incorporated by Royal Charter Founded 1878 Registered Charity 312832
President: HRH The Prince Philip Duke of Edinburgh KG KT HonFCGI
Chairman: Michael Howell HonFCGI Director-General: Chris Jones



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

operate, and is likely to disadvantage candidates for the following reasons:

- a choice of assessment titles is provided so tutors can look through and select the topic(s) most likely to engage their learners' interest
 - tutors should be familiar with the format of the assessment and able to ensure their learners;
 - a. will be able understand the scenario and any particular concepts or terminology used (especially for non-native English speakers)
 - b. have access to any equipment they might need during the assessment
- this kind of assessment preparation is perfectly legitimate and is distinct from 'teaching to the test'
- all assessors need to be thoroughly standardised on all of the assessment titles they are involved in marking
 - the assessments are not designed for one-off usage, even though they must not be used for practice and particular candidates should only sit each assessment once.

Whilst the assessments must be presented unseen to candidates, they should not be unseen to assessors.

Level 1-2 paper-based assessments

The Level 1-2 paper assessments may take place at any time over the five-day assessment window and need not all take place at the same time. See www.cityandguilds.com/57605 for details.

Although the assessment papers are delivered in sealed packets, they may be opened on the first day of the window and transported to different sites/locations as required. Although these documents should not be opened before the start of the window, it can be a good idea for at least one person within the centre with a detailed understanding of Functional Skills to briefly look over the paper before it is taken by candidates to ensure candidates will be able to access all of the equipment they might need (the Functional Skills handbook gives general guidance about the range of what will normally be required).

Unlike Entry level, the Level 1-2 external assessments cannot be retained after they have been taken, although there is no reason why tutors cannot have sight of them **during the window** to help them gain more insight into the assessments and aid future candidate preparation. Again, this should not be confused with 'teaching to the test'.

Onscreen FS English results: sorry about the recent delays

We've recently had some marking capacity problems that have slowed down the results turnaround for FS English Writing assessments taken on-screen. The problems were largely a result of a very sudden surge in the number of assessments being taken, though they were compounded by an imbalance in the number of Reading vs Writing markers set up on our systems (for understandable reasons, each Writing paper takes longer to mark than a Reading assessment).

A number of contingency measures were put into place as soon as the Writing bottleneck became apparent, and we're pleased to report that we're now back on track with virtually all on-screen FS English assessment results being turned around within the target 20 working days. It's important to emphasise that only the **on-screen Writing** assessments were affected by this issue. Any other delays with particular results are likely to have been

the result of other factors such as the ones we outlined in last month's Functional Skills newsletter.

For any centres and learners affected by these delays, we are sorry and fully appreciate the inconvenience this will have caused. We are making a number of changes to the marking process as a result, and, as we've indicated previously, will be introducing a new system for marking the paper-based assessments from September which will reduce the turnaround time for these assessments to 20 working days (instead of 32).

As a general piece of advice, where you do have queries about Functional Skills assessment results, could we ask that you contact our Customer Relations team on 0844 543 0000 or email **centresupport@cityandguilds.com**. For operational queries this is considerably quicker than using the 'functionalskills' address as it enables the query to be logged and investigated straightaway. The latter should only be used for 'content' questions or feedback about the Functional Skills qualifications.

When is the cut-off date for FS assessment entries?

We're often asked when is the absolute cut-off date for submitting entries for paper-based Level 1-2 Functional Skills assessments.

Aside from late entry fees being waived for FS ICT and FS Mathematics, our normal exams late entry policy applies in all other respects. This states that 'entries will not be accepted within the 14 days prior to the exam date'. See **www.cityandguilds.com/43910** for details.

The Functional Skills assessments do not have an 'exam date' as such since they can be taken at any time over a five-day window, although the crucial date is when the Walled Garden stops accepting entries for a particular assessment window; this is set to happen two clear weeks before the **published** assessment date for which the assessment has been set up on our systems (as displayed in the Catalogue as well as in the five-day window guidance). For example the published date for this month's FS ICT assessments is Monday 20 June, so we stopped accepting Walled Garden entries on Sunday 5 June. The published date does not always fall on a Monday, so the actual lead-in can vary depending on how far it is into the assessment window.

In exceptional circumstances entries can still sometimes be made even after the cut-off date by calling our Customer Relations team, though this would be at the discretion of our Assessment team and is subject to a marker being available to take the scripts.

Note the system cut-off is calculated on calendar rather than working days: this two-week lead-in is sometimes wrongly interpreted as ten working days.

ESOL Skills for Life: change to assessment conduct requirements

We've recently written to all ESOL Skills for Life (3692) centres clarifying a couple of specific points about the new qualification approval and monitoring arrangements that were introduced last autumn, as well as announcing a slight change to the interlocutor requirements for Entry level Speaking and Listening assessments. A copy of the letter is available on the ESOL Skills for Life qualification page; **www.cityandguilds.com/48281**

Key Skills and proxy exemption: a reminder

We've been asked if the new Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for England (SASE) has any impact on the proxy exemption arrangements that apply within the Key Skills qualifications.

Proxy exemption is a feature of the Key Skills qualifications, and should not be confused with the regulations concerning qualifications required for Apprenticeship framework completion (sometimes known as the 'Relaxation Rule'). There have recently been some changes to the latter as a result of SASE, although this is chiefly to clarify the circumstances in which qualifications other than Functional Skills may be accepted. See www.apprenticeships.org.uk/Partners/SASE.aspx for details.

Confusingly, some Apprenticeship issuing authorities (SSCs) have been clumsy about using the word 'proxy' in some of their documentation; when they use the term it is likely that they are referring to the qualifications they will accept for framework completion in lieu of Key/Functional Skills, rather than qualifications that can help candidates to achieve a Key Skills qualification.

The proxy exemption arrangements are explained fully on our Key Skills qualifications webpage (www.cityandguilds.com/keyskills). They relate to the qualifications that allow candidates working towards a Key Skills qualification to claim exemption from part of their assessment.

Please note that proxy exemption almost always relates only to the test component of the Key Skills qualifications. There are no proxy qualifications that entitle candidates to exemption from the portfolio component of Application of Number below Level 3, and none at all for Communication.

New handbook for Essential Skills (NI)

A new qualification handbook has just been published to support the Essential Skills qualifications (3800) in Northern Ireland. This is the first major update to the handbook since these qualifications were originally introduced in 2003-04.

The handbook features much clearer guidance on centre staff qualifications and incorporates the full standards and guidance for Level 1-2 Communication, Application of Number and ICT into a single document. It can be downloaded from our Essential Skills qualification page (www.cityandguilds.com/essentialskillsni).

Please note we'll be holding a special Network event for Essential Skills tutors on Thursday 1 September at our Belfast local office. For details and to book your place please go to www.cityandguilds.com/events.