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Reflecting on the first year of the functional skills pilot

**Terry Smith
QCA Adviser**

What are Functional Skills intended to do:

- have content that is accessible and relevant to learners of all ages;
- be deliverable in the full range of educational settings, including schools, colleges, further education, training providers, the justice system and workplaces;
- present no unnecessary barriers to achievement in terms of access or equality of opportunity;
- address skills challenges within the UK economy;
- reflect the needs of employers;
- be appropriate successor qualifications for all qualifications they may replace.

Functional skills standards:

- have been developed initially at Entry Levels, and at Levels 1 and 2;
- are technical statements being used as the basis for qualification development;
- relate closely to the Skills for Life standards;
- are at a sufficient level of subject knowledge and understanding to develop skills that can be applied purposefully in life and work;
- can support levels of competence assessment (i.e. demonstrate that a learner can apply specific knowledge in various contexts).

The assessment model:

- **Assessments:**
- are being designed to measure the application of skills for a purpose within real life scenarios;
- can be completely task-based or a combination of tasks with test elements
- are never completely test-based;
- requirements are specified externally, (by the awarding body);
- items are externally set by an awarding body or externally set to provide for internally contextualised task-based assessments. This applies at all levels;
- quality assurance arrangements apply.

The Pilot:

- began on 3rd September 2007 and pilots are now in their 2nd year;
- 11 awarding bodies engaged in piloting activity across all types of centre including schools, general FE colleges, training provision, in the workplace, community and in the offender institutions;
- operating in over 2000 centres, including Diploma Gateway Consortia plus centres outside the Gateway;

Functional skills development timetable:

- standards were agreed and finalised for pilot **June 2007**;
- pilot qualifications commenced **Sept 2007**;
- piloting the qualifications in Diplomas started **Sept 2008**;
- Functional English, mathematics and ICT available **Sept 2010**;
- Key skills and adult literacy and numeracy qualifications available at least until the functional skills qualifications are fully available;
- continued support for the wider key skills.

A new strand to assess suitability in Skills for Life contexts:

- a new 2 year strand of work within the national pilot sponsored by DIUS starting this academic year;
- designed to explore effectiveness in all SfL contexts;
- focus on accessibility, flexibility, user friendliness and learner feedback;
- working closely with LSC and workforce development partners;
- to provide advice to DIUS on the potential replacement of Skills for Life certificates in adult literacy and adult numeracy;
- ESOL contexts explored, but no plans to replace ESOL qualifications.

Key facts about the new strand:

- it does not replace adult activity in the main pilot and we expect the numbers of adults and SfL contexts to continue to increase in number there;
- the activity is supplementary and concentrating on the development of flexibility;
- the ongoing review of SfL qualifications will feed into the new strand;
- it will begin as a small scale development building over the 2 years to statistically meaningful numbers;

What about ICT?

- All Skills for Life qualifications are being reviewed by the QCA
- Accreditation of ICT SfL qualifications post 2010 has to be viewed in the contexts of the implementation of Functional ICT and the QCF
- Is there a benefit to SfL ICT which is not covered by Functional ICT?
- What should basic ICT qualifications look like in a credit based environment?