Analysis of responses to our consultation on implementing Functional Skills reform

Consultation on rules and guidance for new Functional Skills Qualifications in English and mathematics

Contents

Executive summary

Our consultation on our proposed rules and guidance for new Functional Skills Qualifications (FSQs) in English and mathematics took place between 28 March and 11 May 2018. The consultation questions were available to either complete online or to download. A copy is available at:
www.gov.uk/government/consultations/implementing-functional-skills-reform

1.   Introduction

The consultation on implementing Functional Skills reform – English and mathematics

This report is a summary of the views expressed by those who responded to our consultation.

Background

The Department for Education has taken the decision to reform Functional Skills Qualifications in English and mathematics across all five levels, and has published subject content for these reformed qualifications.[1] The reformed Functional Skills Qualifications will be introduced for first teaching from September 2019.

Our earlier policy consultation on Functional Skills Qualification reform[2] sought views on our proposed approach to regulating reformed Functional Skills Qualifications in English and mathematics across all five levels.

Our consultation on implementing Functional Skills reform[3] sought views on our proposed Conditions and Guidance for reformed Functional Skills Qualifications in English and mathematics. The consultation ran between 28 March 2018 and 11 May 2018. We set out below the detail of the responses received to the consultation.

---

[1] Subject content for English - www.gov.uk/government/publications/functional-skills-subject-content-english
Subject content for mathematics - www.gov.uk/government/publications/functional-skills-subject-content-mathematics
[2] www.gov.uk/government/consultations/reforming-functional-skills-qualifications-in-english-and-maths
[3] www.gov.uk/government/consultations/implementing-functional-skills-reform

2.   Who responded?

We received a total of 32 responses to our consultation. There were 30 full responses to the consultation questions and two further written submissions, in which the respondents did not complete the mandatory screening questions. We have reviewed these two responses to ensure they raise no additional material, and while we do not include them in the quantitative analysis of responses below and in Section 4, we have incorporated the views raised within the qualitative analysis.[4]

Of those responses which gave their respondent type, 12 were from individuals and 18 were from organisations. All of the responses were from individuals or organisations based in England or Wales.

Personal / organisation response	Respondent type	Number
Personal	Teacher	5
Personal	Private tutor	1
Personal	School leadership	2
Personal	Education consultant	3
Personal	General public	1
Organisation	School/college/academy chain/private training provider	2
Organisation	Other representative or interest group	4
Organisation	Awarding body or exam board	12

---

[4] See section 3 on our approach to analysis.

3.   Approach to analysis

The consultation included 36 questions and was published on www.gov.uk. Respondents could choose to respond using an online form, by email or by posting their responses to the consultation questions to us.

Responses received are the views of those who wished to participate and, while we tried to ensure that as many respondents as possible had the opportunity to reply, responses cannot be considered as representative of any specific group.

We present the responses to the consultation questions in the order in which they were asked.

The consultation asked questions which were focused on our proposed Conditions, and Guidance for new Functional Skills Qualifications in English and mathematics. The proposed Conditions and Guidance were published in draft form alongside the consultations questions, and respondents were provided with the opportunity to provide comments that directly related to the detailed drafting of those documents.

Respondents could choose to answer all or just some of the questions in our consultation. For some questions, respondents could indicate the extent to which they agreed with our proposals, using a 5-point scale (Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree and Strongly disagree), as well as providing free-form narrative comments on our proposals.

Other questions allowed respondents to say whether they had any comments to make on a proposal, and if they said yes, allowed them to provide free-form narrative comments. For these questions we set out whether respondents replied 'yes' or 'no' and analyse any comments made.

During the analysis phase we reviewed every response to each question, and also the responses that did not follow the format of the consultation.

4. Views expressed – consultation response outcomes

In this section we report the views, in broad terms, of respondents to the consultation.

> **Question 1 – To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to setting rules for assessment strategy documents?**

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Strongly agree	7	12	17
Agree	22		
Neither agree nor disagree	1	0	1
Disagree	0	0	0
Strongly disagree	0		

Of those respondents who agreed and provided a comment, many felt that Ofqual's proposed approach was appropriate, would improve standards across awarding organisations and ensure assessment is of a consistent standard. Comments also suggested that the approach was comprehensive and clear.

One organisation noted that the requirements as set out were useful, and emphasised the importance of clearly articulated expectations, so that an awarding organisations can ensure the assessment strategy they submit meets the requirements. The same organisation also felt that an on-demand delivery model might make responding promptly to communications regarding the assessment strategy difficult, an issue also raised by the respondent who neither agreed nor disagreed with the overall proposal.

One respondent questioned whether it was necessary for assessment strategies to detail organisation-level approaches to compliance with our rules. Another respondent queried whether there would be a right of appeal against a decision to require changes to an assessment strategy.

The respondent who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal felt the level of detail required in the assessment strategy was unclear. The respondent asked for the following changes to be made to the tables setting out requirements for assessment strategies, in order to improve clarity:

▪ references to the specific sections of the relevant Conditions, rather than a general reference

- differentiation between references to the General Conditions and the Functional Skills Conditions and Guidance

Question 2 – To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed rules around the technical evaluation process?

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Strongly agree	6	11	15
Agree	20		
Neither agree nor disagree	4	1	3
Disagree	0	0	0
Strongly disagree	0		

Of those respondents who agreed, comments suggest that the approach proposed is 'sensible and logical' and would further improve standardisation.

One organisation which agreed with our proposal indicated that, given the challenging timescales, awarding organisations would appreciate early sight of a comprehensive list of the materials required for the technical evaluation and in what quantity, together with a timescale for any required resubmission. The respondent also welcomed the proposal to, in some circumstances, allow awarding organisations to make the qualification available before the changes required by Ofqual have been made; saying that this would allow issues to be addressed without delaying the launch of the qualification.

Of the respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal, one organisation felt that whilst the evaluation was necessary, there was insufficient detail on the process in the consultation document. The respondent said that they would welcome early sight of the detail of this process, as uncertainty may impede awarding organisations' forward planning.

Question 3 − To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to interpreting the subject content requirements for new FSQs in English?

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Strongly agree	3	6	9

Agree	12		
Neither agree nor disagree	4	1	3
Disagree	8	4	5
Strongly disagree	1		

Of those respondents who agreed, comments suggest that Ofqual's proposal will ensure consistency between awarding organisations.

Of the respondents who disagreed with the proposal and provided comment, some set out concerns relating to the subject content document, and others provided comments on our earlier decision to prevent access to dictionaries and other spelling and grammar checks in assessments, and the perception that this is not reflective of everyday working practice.

Of the respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed and provided a comment (both organisations), one felt that the subject content was, to an extent, still open to interpretation. The other respondent who provided a comment highlighting a concern that additional guidance could lead to prescription, thus undermining flexibility and innovation in the design of qualifications. However the same respondent went on to suggest that the guidance provided by Ofqual was necessary to give precision and clarity (and therefore ensure a uniform approach) around the interpretation of the subject content requirements.

Question 4 − To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to interpreting the subject content requirements for new FSQs in mathematics?

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Strongly agree	2	5	11
Agree	14		
Neither agree nor disagree	5	4	1
Disagree	4	3	4
Strongly disagree	3		

Of the respondents who agreed with our proposed approach, some provided comments which welcomed the proposals and noted the importance of consistency in interpreting the subject content across awarding organisations. Some comments indicated that respondents would welcome further guidance to support the subject

content but did not provide details, and there were others that raised concerns which related more generally to the subject content.

Of the respondents who disagreed and provided a comment, comments raised issues with our decision to prohibit calculator use in Functional Skills assessments with some giving the view that this is not reflective of everyday work. Other comments sought further amplification/clarification of the subject content, especially regarding the definition of problem solving and underpinning skills.

Some of the respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal, highlighted concerns which related to the subject content rather than our proposed approach. As with the previous question, one respondent highlighted that whilst guidance was undesirable, as it may lead to prescription, it is necessary in this instance.

Question 5 − To what extent do you agree with our proposed minimum and maximum overall assessment time requirements in English?

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Strongly agree	5	10	12
Agree	17		
Neither agree nor disagree	6	2	4
Disagree	0	0	1
Strongly disagree	1		

Of the respondents who agreed with our proposal, many commented that Ofqual's proposed assessment times were appropriate. A number of respondents felt that the proposals should be kept under review, particularly in the early stages of the delivery of new Functional Skills Qualifications, and one respondent felt it would be helpful for Ofqual to prescribe exact assessment times, rather than providing awarding organisations with a range to work within.

The organisation that disagreed and provided a comment, suggested that the proposed assessment times were excessive and would not keep a learner engaged.

Of the respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal, one respondent suggested that a review of the assessment times would be necessary to ensure manageability for centres and learners. Another requested fixed assessment times should be required, in order to prevent assessment times becoming an inappropriate 'element of market differentiation'.

Question 6 − To what extent do you agree with our proposed minimum and maximum overall assessment time requirements in mathematics?

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Strongly agree	3	5	9
Agree	11		
Neither agree nor disagree	6	3	3
Disagree	8	3	5
Strongly disagree	0		

The respondents who agreed with our proposals commented that the increases to assessment times were justified in order to ensure that the subject content was adequately covered. Respondents again suggested it would be advantageous to review the assessment durations once the reformed Functional Skills Qualifications have been developed.

Of the respondents who disagreed with our proposals and provided a comment, three felt that the proposed assessment times were too long, whilst one felt they were too short.

Of the two respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal and provided a comment, one felt that further consideration needs to be given to the management of the calculator/non-calculator components and how this will impact on the timings for assessment. The other requested a fixed assessment time in order to prevent assessment time becoming an inappropriate 'element of market differentiation'.

Question 7 − To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to setting rules around the contextualisation of the reading and writing assessments at the Entry levels?

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Strongly agree	7	9	14
Agree	16		
Neither agree nor disagree	6	3	3
Disagree	0	0	0

Strongly disagree	0		

The respondents who agreed with our proposal emphasised the importance of centre contextualisation in order to ensure assessments at the Entry levels meet the needs of learners. They also expressed support for the need for oversight of this contextualisation by awarding organisations in order to ensure consistency.

Of the respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal, one respondent felt our proposal would not prove different to current arrangements, providing that centres are clear that contextualisation must not alter the skills being tested.

Question 8 − To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposal to set a rule on awarding organisations to provide guidance to centres around any setting, adaptation, delivery or marking of assessments that they undertake?

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Strongly agree	13	11	15
Agree	13		
Neither agree nor disagree	3	1	2
Disagree	0	0	0
Strongly disagree	0		

Of those respondents who agreed and provided a comment, it was thought that this approach would ensure consistency and comparability both between centres and awarding organisations.

Of the respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal, the two that provided comments suggested such a rule was unnecessary, as any awarding organisation not providing effective guidance to centres would be in breach of the General Conditions of Recognition.

Question 9 – To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposal to put in place guidance on assessment availability?

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Strongly agree	6	6	10

Agree	10		
Neither agree nor disagree	7	3	4
Disagree	5	3	4
Strongly disagree	2		

Of those respondents who agreed and provided a comment, the guidance on assessment availability was welcomed, although some respondents noted that whilst such guidance provided clarity it was not strictly necessary.

Of the respondents who disagreed and provided a comment, three provided views that appeared to support our proposal, and of the remaining responses, two mistakenly believed we sought to prevent the on-demand delivery of assessments.

Of the respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal, comments supported the need to retain the flexibility of Functional Skills to accommodate the wide range of learners for whom they cater. Some of the remaining comments suggested that respondents had not consulted the guidance provided alongside the consultation, and one respondent questioned the necessity of additional guidance.

> **Question 10 – To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposal to mandate a common approach to issuing results, so that all learners who do not meet the required standard receive a result of 'Fail'?**

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	**Individuals**	**Organisations**
Strongly agree	12	11	14
Agree	13		
Neither agree nor disagree	2	0	2
Disagree	1	1	2
Strongly disagree	2		

Of those respondents who agreed and provided a comment, many commented that Pass/Fail outcomes were appropriate for these qualifications and would ensure that it was absolutely clear to employers and further education institutions how the results compare. Two respondents expressed a concern that whilst the results need to be clear, the use of the word 'fail' has negative connotations which may affect learners.

One respondent questioned whether the reporting of a Pass/Fail grade was at the point of issuing a statement of results, or at the point of certification, as Fail

certificates are not issued for qualifications. Two respondents sought clarification on whether additional information could be represented on certificates, for example attainment at component level.

Of the respondents who disagreed and provided a comment, one expressed the view that the proposed requirements were not sufficiently clear as to whether a Pass/Fail grade was to be issued at assessment, component or qualification level. This respondent noted that a Fail grade is never issued at qualification level. Another respondent highlighted a difficulty in the event that it was required that a learner must be issued a Fail result simply where they have not yet taken all necessary assessments.

Of the respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal and provided a comment, one agreed in principal but questioned the use of the word 'Fail'. The other indicated that they support the proposal in reference to the issuing of a statement of results, but felt it was inappropriate to issue fail certificates at qualification level.

> **Question 11 – To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to setting rules around the number of assessments and tasks in the reading, writing and speaking, listening and communicating components?**

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Strongly agree	6	9	14
Agree	17		
Neither agree nor disagree	6	3	3
Disagree	0	0	1
Strongly disagree	1		

Of those respondents who agreed, comments indicated that our proposal would make the approach to assessment more consistent.

The respondent who disagreed with our proposal voiced a concern that, as the spelling test could constitute a separate assessment, Entry level learners may end up taking more assessments than learners at Level 1 and Level 2.

Some respondents commented that they would welcome further guidance, especially regarding the approach to the spelling test at Entry level.

Question 12 – To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to the assessment of the reading expectations?

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Strongly agree	3	10	6
Agree	13		
Neither agree nor disagree	6	2	4
Disagree	6	0	6
Strongly disagree	0		

Of those respondents who agreed and provided a comment, it was felt that Ofqual's proposed approach sufficiently balanced consistency between awarding organisations with flexibility in assessment design.

Across the respondents who disagreed and those who neither agreed nor disagreed, the following views were expressed:

- clarity regarding what constitutes a 'representative sample' would be welcomed
- sampling the subject content could lead to predictability and teaching to the test
- sampling may lead to the composition of inauthentic reading passages

Question 13 – To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to the assessment of the spelling expectations?

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Strongly agree	4	5	5
Agree	6		
Neither agree nor disagree	6	2	5
Disagree	8	5	8
Strongly disagree	6		

Of those respondents who agreed and provided a comment, responses suggest that spelling ability is an important part of learners' progress and that the number of words being assessed was reasonable. One respondent expressed concern about

the words included in the lists (which appear at the end of the subject content) and their appropriateness to learners, while another expressed concerns about predictability. One organisation felt that there was a risk that undue emphasis was being placed upon spelling; they also sought a definition of what would constitute a 'representative sample' of words to be covered.

Of the respondents who disagreed and provided a comment, several respondents felt that the prohibition of dictionaries was counter to the purpose of Functional Skills Qualifications. Two organisations agreed that spelling should be explicitly tested, but felt this could result in predictable assessments over time (respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed also provided similar comments).

One organisation felt that spelling should be assessed as part of the written composition only, and that there should not be a separate spelling test. This respondent felt that the subject content would be better used as a basis for teaching and marking spelling within a composition task.

> **Question 14 – To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to setting guidance around the use of language and stimulus materials that is in line with the reading and spelling expectations set for each Entry level?**

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Strongly agree	12	8	12
Agree	8		
Neither agree nor disagree	7	3	4
Disagree	1	1	1
Strongly disagree	1		

Of those respondents who agreed and provided a comment, responses highlighted the importance of language and stimulus materials that are level-appropriate so as not to disadvantage learners.

Of the respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal, one organisation agreed that awarding organisations should take account of the use of language when designing assessments, but highlighted some procedural and design challenges with regard to this proposal.

Question 15 – To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed weighting ranges for spelling, punctuation and grammar at both Levels 1 and 2 and at the Entry levels?

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Strongly agree	1	6	3
Agree	8		
Neither agree nor disagree	3	0	3
Disagree	12	6	12
Strongly disagree	6		

Of those respondents who agreed and provided a comment, it was felt that Ofqual's proposal was fair and reasonable.

Of the respondents who disagreed and provided a comment, a number of views were provided:

- the weightings were too low, given the importance of spelling, punctuation and grammar as a basis for communication
- the weightings would not allow for sufficient coverage of the subject content
- few learners currently access dictionaries or spelling/grammar check, so a reduction to weightings on this basis was unnecessary
- reducing the weighting could lead to reduced differentiation between levels of performance
- reducing the weighting could result in the perception that the component is easier to pass
- the weightings are too high, and would disadvantage learners

Of the respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal, one respondent felt that this approach was similar to that which exists.

Question 16 – To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed common assessment criteria?

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Strongly agree	8	11	15

Agree	18		
Neither agree nor disagree	2	1	1
Disagree	1	0	2
Strongly disagree	1		

Of those respondents who agreed and provided a comment, the majority stated that the proposed common assessment criteria would allow for greater comparability and standardisation. Three respondents agreed with the approach, but felt that the performance descriptor may need refinement. One respondent indicated that they would welcome common assessment criteria for all components, not just speaking, listening and communication.

Both respondents who disagreed were concerned that the common assessment criteria was too ambiguous and open to interpretation.

> **Question 17 – To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposal to require awarding organisations to produce exemplar materials to support assessor judgements in relation to the speaking, listening and communicating component?**

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Strongly agree	10	10	17
Agree	17		
Neither agree nor disagree	1	0	1
Disagree	1	2	0
Strongly disagree	1		

Of those respondents who agreed, comments indicated that Ofqual's proposal was welcomed and would enable assessors to be more accurate in their judgements. Some respondents suggested that such materials had been previously lacking from some awarding organisations. Several organisations requested clarification as to whether the exemplar materials would be considered within Ofqual's technical evaluation, whilst others expressed some concern regarding the timing and logistics of the proposal. Some respondents queried what would constitute an acceptable number of exemplar materials, whilst one organisational respondent felt that the quantity of exemplar materials required at Entry level could be confusing to centres.

Of the respondents who disagreed, one did not offer a comment, and the other provided a comment that appeared to be in support of our proposal.

Question 18 – To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposal to disapply our General Condition of Recognition H2 (moderation where an assessment is marked by a centre) in respect of the speaking, listening and communicating component?

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Strongly agree	12	6	12
Agree	6		
Neither agree nor disagree	8	5	3
Disagree	4	1	3
Strongly disagree	0		

Respondents who agreed commented that they felt the approach was pragmatic and would promote consistency.

Of the respondents who disagreed with the proposal and provided a comment, one stated that moderation is an important aspect of standardisation and comparability, ensuring a pass in the speaking, listening and communicating component is truly reflective of a learner's ability. Another respondent expressed concerns that the proposal for monitoring visits could pose issues for centres with small numbers or those where there are access constraints. This respondent also flagged a concern that an additional observer could have a negative impact on learners.

The respondent (an awarding organisation) who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal commented that the disapplication of H2 was unnecessary as they record all speaking, listening and communicating assessments to allow for moderation.

Question 19 – To what extent do you agree or disagree with the monitoring arrangements we are proposing to put in place for the speaking, listening and communicating component?

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Strongly agree	10	9	13
Agree	12		
Neither agree nor disagree	5	2	3

| Disagree | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Strongly disagree | 1 | | |

Of those respondents who agreed and provided a comment, responses indicated this was a welcome proposal that would ensure consistency. One organisation outlined a potential financial burden in respect of very small centres, while another highlighted a potential administrative burden for centres during busy periods.

Of the respondents who disagreed and provided a comment, responses suggest the proposed approach would be too onerous to administer, for both centres and awarding organisations. The individual who disagreed thought the approach would be especially difficult for small organisations working with learners with 'different needs.'

The respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal acknowledged the benefit and necessity of Ofqual's proposal, but raised a concern that the proposed approach would increase burden for centres.

> **Question 20 – To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposal to produce guidance to clarify that the use of sign language is permitted as a reasonable adjustment in new FSQs in English?**

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	**Individuals**	**Organisations**
Strongly agree	14	11	14
Agree	11		
Neither agree nor disagree	4	1	3
Disagree	1	0	1
Strongly disagree	0		

Of those respondents who agreed, those who commented suggested that this was a welcome and logical proposal. Some respondents requested additional guidance on how to implement this proposal.

The organisation that disagreed with the proposal suggested that learners who use British Sign Language as their usual communication method would be better served by taking another qualification (for example ESOL) where speaking, listening and communication was not required.

Of the respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal and provided a comment, two noted that this is an existing feature of the qualification.

One organisation expressed concern that this approach could be too open to interpretation, and might result in other languages being acceptable.

Question 21 – To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to the number of assessments in new FSQs in mathematics?

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Strongly agree	5	5	13
Agree	13		
Neither agree nor disagree	6	4	2
Disagree	4	3	3
Strongly disagree	2		

Respondents who agreed commented that the proposed approach would allow awarding organisations to take different approaches to assessment whilst maintaining comparability. One organisation noted that, while they supported the use of a single pass mark, this could result in a learner passing the component despite poor performance in the non-calculator assessment.

Of the respondents who disagreed and provided a comment, one felt that two separate assessments could have cost implications for centres, while another felt that a single assessment could be problematic for centres to administer. Another respondent expressed the view that having a single assessment could disadvantage learners.

Of the respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal, a number repeated the view that it would be possible for a learner to pass the qualification with poor performance in the non-calculator assessment, though there was recognition that the introduction of a hurdle would also be undesirable. Another respondent asked whether it would be permitted for learners to re-sit at assessment, rather than component, level.

Question 22 – To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to the coverage of subject content in new FSQs in mathematics?

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Strongly agree	5	9	14

Agree	18		
Neither agree nor disagree	4	2	2
Disagree	2	1	2
Strongly disagree	1		

Of the respondents who agreed and provided a comment, one noted that given the amount of subject content that there is to cover, the degree of flexibility afforded by our proposals ensures the question paper setting process is not overly complicated. Four respondents requested further guidance regarding the coverage of subject content, and one noted that additional weightings to specify the proportion of problem-solving questions that require coverage of all three content areas could be employed to ensure a suitable approach.

Of the respondents who disagreed and provided a comment, one felt that the new requirements would not adequately ensure that sampling is approached consistently and comparably by different awarding organisations, and felt that the requirements would not ensure that assessments acted as a reliable measure of proficiency in the subject.

Of the respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed, one respondent highlighted the importance of realistic contexts in relation to the assessment of the subject content.

Question 23 - To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to the weightings for calculator and non-calculator based assessment?

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Strongly agree	3	3	12
Agree	12		
Neither agree nor disagree	8	5	3
Disagree	4	4	3
Strongly disagree	3		

Respondents who agreed and provided a comment stated that the proposed weightings were reasonable. Five respondents requested explicit guidance on the types of items that would be appropriate for the non-calculator assessment, in order to promote comparability across the different awarding organisations.

Of the respondents who disagreed and provided a comment, three comments were in response to the decision to introduce a non-calculator assessment rather than the weightings. Two respondents highlighted that a learner could pass the qualification with low achievement in the non-calculator assessment, and one comment appeared to be in support of our proposal.

Of the respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal, one comment raised potential logistical issues around the introduction of non-calculator based assessment for Learners completing paper-based assessments.

Question 24 – To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to the weightings for underpinning skills and problem solving?

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Strongly agree	2	6	11
Agree	15		
Neither agree nor disagree	9	5	4
Disagree	3	1	2
Strongly disagree	0		

Of those respondents who agreed, comments indicated agreement with the proposed weightings, but further clarification was sought by a number of respondents regarding the definitions of underpinning skills and problem solving. One organisation expressed a concern that the proposal for a reasonable balance between underpinning skills and problem solving in both the calculator and non-calculator assessments (or assessment sections) would be interpreted in an overly prescriptive manner.

Of the respondents who disagreed and provided a comment, one felt the weightings were proportionate, but that underpinning skills should not be assessed in the calculator section/assessment. Another respondent felt that such approaches to weightings increase levels of standards variability.

Of the respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal, comments indicated agreement with the proposed weightings, but raised concerns and sought clarification regarding the allocation of marks where problem solving items contain an amount of underpinning skills.

Question 25 – To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposals around the use of evidence to support standard setting?

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Strongly agree	5	9	16
Agree	20		
Neither agree nor disagree	2	1	1
Disagree	2	2	0
Strongly disagree	0		

Of those respondents who agreed, comments indicated support of our proposals, but would welcome further guidance on the use of evidence in standard setting. Some respondents questioned the use, availability and applicability of prior attainment evidence, given, for example, the wide range of learners taking Functional Skills Qualifications.

Of the respondents who disagreed and provided a comment, both commented on the difficulty of acquiring prior attainment data for mature students.

Of the respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal, one didn't provide a comment, while the other appeared to agree with the proposal.

Question 26 – To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposals around maintaining standards in reformed FSQs?

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Strongly agree	6	9	11
Agree	14		
Neither agree nor disagree	4	1	3
Disagree	4	2	3
Strongly disagree	1		

Of those respondents who agreed and provided a comment, it was felt that the proposal would ensure comparability across awarding organisations and ensure standards are comparable across different versions of assessments.

Of the respondents who disagreed and provided a comment, the 'spiky profile' of achievement for English was raised, where achievement varies across the three components. Respondents felt that allowing learners to sit assessments across

levels, and the subsequent reporting of their achievement allowed learners to fully evidence their competence and that the proposals may limit and impede progression.

Of the respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal, one respondent commented that the proposed approach may lead to an increased number of component exemptions being granted, as learners will no longer be permitted to fall back and take a component at a lower level.

Question 27 – Do you have any comments on our proposed rules and guidance for new FSQs in English?

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	**Individuals**	**Organisations**
Yes	11	5	6
No	19	7	12

Of those who responded provided a comment, responses included:

- concern that proposals would be 'disproportionately disadvantageous' for smaller awarding organisations
- disagreement with the removal of dictionaries and spelling and grammar checks
- concern that some Conditions were not appropriate for Entry level learners
- concern regarding the number of assessments

Question 28 – Do you have any comments on our proposed rules and guidance for new FSQs in mathematics?

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	**Individuals**	**Organisations**
Yes	10	3	7
No	20	9	11

Of those who responded and provided a comment, responses included:

- concern that proposals would be 'disproportionately disadvantageous' for smaller awarding organisations
- disagreement with the requirement to complete non-calculator tasks
- concern that some Conditions were not appropriate for Entry level learners

- a request for further clarification regarding the design of the non-calculator section/assessment
- a request for further clarification regarding resitting the assessment(s)

Question 29 – Are there any regulatory impacts that we have not identified arising from our proposals?

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	**Individuals**	**Organisations**
Yes	6	3	3
No	24	9	15

Of those who responded 'yes' and provided a comment, the following comments were made:

- the proposals would be 'disproportionately disadvantageous' for smaller awarding organisations and do not take into account the significance of cost implications for smaller organisations
- a turnaround timeline was requested, in respect of the Ofqual feedback that would be received following the technical evaluation process
- one respondent raised a risk that smaller awarding organisations could be excluded from offering the qualifications

Question 30 – Are there any additional steps we could take to minimise the regulatory impact of our proposals?

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	**Individuals**	**Organisations**
Yes	5	3	2
No	25	9	16

Of those who responded, one organisation noted the proposals will have a regulatory impact for every awarding organisation, and each requirement should have clear and explicit guidance to ensure implementation is straightforward and comparable across awarding organisations. The other respondents offered comments that were not germane to the question asked.

Question 31 – Are there any costs or benefits associated with our proposals which we have not identified?

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	**Individuals**	**Organisations**
Yes	9	4	5
No	21	8	13

Of those who provided a comment, the following costs or benefits were identified:

- additional costs for the technical evaluation
- additional costs for the development of one organisation's systems to handle the mathematics assessment(s)
- increased costs regarding monitoring requirements
- an increased cost to centres with regard to the number of assessments

Many respondents indicated that they would respond to this question separately, in response to Ofqual's information request relating to the regulatory impact on awarding organisations of our proposals for implementing Functional Skills reform.[5]

Question 32 – Is there any additional information we should consider when evaluating the costs and benefits of our proposals?

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	**Individuals**	**Organisations**
Yes	5	2	3
No	25	10	15

Of those who provided a comment, the following comments were made:

- costs are more significant to smaller awarding organisations
- awarding organisations run Functional Skills Qualifications as loss leaders, and any increase in cost may reduce the number of awarding organisations who offer the qualifications
- additional invigilation and general staffing costs could be incurred by centres

---

[5] The analysis of those responses can be found in the Regulatory Impact Analysis that accompanies this publication.

- additional centre visits may be necessary in the infancy of the reformed qualifications

Question 33 – Do you have any comments on any ways in which our proposals will prevent innovation by awarding organisations?

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	**Individuals**	**Organisations**
Yes	6	3	3
No	24	9	15

Of those who provided a comment, the following comments were made:

- there is sufficient flexibility in Ofqual's proposals
- the withdrawal of spelling and grammar checks will impact on innovation, (though this comment was not explained further)
- the reformed qualifications do not adequately assess student autonomy, decision-making, strategy and process, considered to be key aspects of functional proficiency

Question 34 – We have set out the ways in which our proposals could impact (positively or negatively) on learners who share a protected characteristic. Are there any potential impacts that we have not identified?

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	**Individuals**	**Organisations**
Yes	13	4	9
No	17	8	9

Of those who responded yes and provided a comment, the following comments were made:

- it is unclear whether the new subject content was subjected to a review and analysis in terms of equality of opportunity, access and inclusion prior to approval
- the proposals introduce a number of changes that adversely impact learners with disabilities and learning difficulties, for example the assessment times in mathematics at Entry levels, the assessment and weighting of spelling, punctuation and grammar, and English components needing to be achieved at the same level

- spelling tests at Entry level could be disadvantageous for learners with special educational needs and disabilities, including autism spectrum disorder

- spelling tests at Entry level could present a barrier for learners with a hearing impairment, particularly where British Sign Language is not used by learners

- spelling tests at Entry level could present a barrier for learners using British Sign Language; as one sign can encompass several words, it would be difficult for learners to distinguish which word they are being asked to spell

- preventing learners from taking components at different levels would result in centres not being able to differentiate where learners have 'spiky profiles'.

Question 35 - Are there any additional steps we could take to mitigate any negative impact, resulting from our proposals, on learners who share a protected characteristic?

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Yes	11	5	6
No	19	7	12

Of those who responded yes and provided a comment, the following comments were made:

- there is sufficient flexibility in Ofqual's approach

- paper-based assessments should remain an option, as these are often more appropriate for learners with particular needs and disabilities

- the proposals introduce a number of changes that adversely impact learners with disabilities and learning difficulties, for example the assessment times in mathematics at Entry levels, the assessment and weighting of spelling, punctuation and grammar, and English components needing to be achieved at the same level

- additional guidance regarding the spelling test for specific groups would be helpful

- exemption from the spelling test, as opposed to the full writing component, should be permitted

Question 36 – Do you have any other comments on the impacts of our proposals on learners who share a protected characteristic? (The term 'protected characteristics' is defined in the Equality Act 2010. Here, it means sex, disability, racial group, age, religion or belief, pregnancy or maternity, sexual orientation and gender reassignment).

Responses from those who responded to this question were as follows:

	Total	**Individuals**	**Organisations**
Yes	5	3	2
No	25	9	16

Of those who responded 'yes' and provided a comment, the following comments were made:

- the removal of dictionaries at Levels 1 and 2 could negatively impact learners with dyslexia
- the ability to contextualise assessments at Entry level provides an opportunity for centres to mitigate negative impacts on learners

Appendix A: list of organisational consultation respondents

When completing the consultation questions, respondents were asked to indicate whether they were responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation.

Below we list those organisations that submitted a non-confidential response to the consultation. We have not included a list of those responding as an individual, however, all responses were given equal status in the analysis.

AQA

Association of Colleges

City & Guilds

Federation of Awarding Bodies

Gateway Qualifications

Highfield Qualifications

Industry Qualifications

MEI

National Education Union – Association of Teachers and Lecturers section

NCFE

NOCN

OCR

Open College Network West Midlands

Pearson Education Ltd

Progress to Excellence

Skillsfirst

We wish to make our publications widely accessible. Please contact us at publications@ofqual.gov.uk if you have any specific accessibility requirements.

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at:

Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation
Spring Place
Coventry Business Park
Herald Avenue
Coventry CV5 6UB

Telephone 0300 303 3344