

**DRAFT NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR ADULT
LITERACY AND NUMERACY**

FEDA RESPONSE

General Questionnaire

These standards have been developed to underpin the basic skills strategy proposed by the Moser Report and to bring coherence and clarity to the new curriculum for adult basic skills, revised basic skills qualifications and the forthcoming national tests for literacy and numeracy.

1a Is the purpose made clear by the standards and introduction?

Quite clear.

The overall purpose is clear. However:

- the quote from the report which refers to "the skills, knowledge and understanding that anyone needs to be literate and numerate in the modern world" does call into question:
 - the absence of IT among the basic skills
 - the lack of graphical and 'navigational' literacy skill descriptors.These skills will be essential in the coming decades.
- the final paragraph in the section entitled *Focus of the Standards* states that the "standards have been designed to provide progression into the key skills specifications of communication and application of number at levels 1 and 2." The use of "progression" in this context implies that the basic skills standards are at a lower level than the equivalent key skills, which is misleading. In fact, our mapping indicates that some of the basic skills descriptors demand skills at a higher level than the equivalent key skill.
- The reference to the standards "providing the measures for performance" raises a question about how many of the 'sub-skills' are going to be measured in the new qualifications? The curriculum and the qualifications need to be available in small 'bite-sized' chunks to make them accessible and flexible

2a

The standards have been written for basic skills specialists and not for adult learners themselves. As far as possible the standards use plain English. The technical language associated with other language and mathematical developments is used where there is a demand for accuracy and precision. The reasons for this are twofold: to make clear links and show alignments with parallel frameworks, and to provide the clear and specific descriptions required to take aspects of the basic skills strategy.

Is the meaning of the language of the standards clear?

Quite clear

We agree that at this stage the standards need to be written in technical language for . The language of the standards is mostly clear. Any suggestions for improvements are contained within the specific questionnaires for literacy and numeracy.

2c

Would it be useful to provide a version of these standards aimed at adult learners?

Adult learners need to be fully involved in the learning process. It would be very useful, at a later stage, to provide a version of these standards in a simplified language aimed at adult learners.

3a

The standards for each basic skill have been set out so that the discrete capabilities that comprise each skill are clearly identified and specified. This format has been adopted to show how each capability connects with the others within that skill, and also how these develop through the skill levels. An additional focus has been the unevenness of adults' 'skill profiles' where an individual may demonstrate, for example oral capabilities at Level 1 but written capabilities at Entry Level 2. The format adopted provides an opportunity for such uneven profiles to be reflected in curriculum or qualification development.

Is the format of the standards clear and logical?

Yes. The additional table describing progression in each skill in Annex 1 is also very useful.

4a

The National Qualifications Framework divides Entry level into three sub-levels. These match the Levels 1, 2 and 3 of the national curriculum. The basic skills standards have followed this model to help developers devise curricula and qualifications that support the development of basic skills. The three sub-levels are designed to provide the 'small steps' needed by adult learners at Entry level. They are not intended to create three new separate levels within Entry Level. Should the Entry level literacy and numeracy standards be sub-divided in this way?

Yes. The proposed sub-divisions are useful. However, Entry 1, as the lowest level, is still too high to provide the comprehensive framework we had hoped for.

5a

In his introduction to A Fresh Start Sir Claus Moser suggested that the report proposals may be appropriate for teaching English to speakers of other languages (ESOL) or English as an additional language (EAL).

Could the standards be used to underpin a specialist curriculum for those whose first language is not English?

Yes, the standards could be suitable, providing that:

- the curriculum is specifically designed for ESOL/EAL learners
- qualifications are specifically designed for ESOL/EAL learners.

They would, however, need to be defined as standards in **English** Communication or **English** Language and Literacy.

5b

What changes would be necessary to enable the standards to inform the developments of this specialist curriculum?

The standards would, with adjustment, be able to underpin the development of a specialist ESOL/EAL curriculum. However, a number of changes would need to be made, including:

- the separation of the listening and speaking skills; as a receptive skill, listening can be developed earlier than the productive skill of speaking, a fact which appears to have been recognised in relation to the literacy skills of reading and writing. This is particularly important for those who do not speak English as their first language.
- the removal of any descriptors which 'mix' skills such as listening and note-taking
- the adjustment downwards of the proposed Entry 1 in order to embrace speakers of other languages starting at a beginner level (who are currently being accredited at Entry level via a range of different specialist qualifications)
- the re-naming of the overall standards as 'English language and literacy' standards or 'communication' standards, in order to accurately reflect their content.

6a

The report also acknowledged that the needs of adults with learning difficulties have not been fully addressed, and called for a separate study. The standards development group recognises that there is a significant minority of adults who may not be able to demonstrate the full range of capabilities at Entry level 1. Do the standards provide a framework for the development of a curriculum for learners whose capabilities lie below Entry level 1?

No, the demands of the proposed Entry 1 are inappropriately high. We recommend that:

- the Entry level standards be adjusted downwards in order to create a fully inclusive framework
- listening and speaking skills be separated
- alternative modes, such as assistive technology, are allowed for learners with disabilities which may prevent them from 'listening', 'speaking', 'reading' or 'writing' in the conventional way.

For details see below.

6b

Please suggest how the standards might be developed to provide such a framework.

The standards need to be as inclusive as possible.

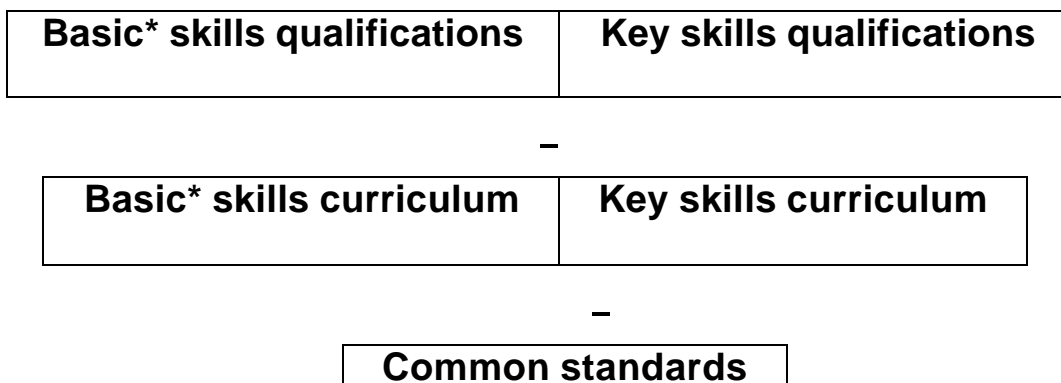
- The current learner-referenced nature of Entry level, while loose and lacking in rigour, does at least enfranchise the large numbers of learners working at this level. We urge QCA to ensure that the new national framework does not **dis**enfranchise them. The widely varying nature of learning difficulties and the differential speed of learning means that the national curriculum is not a suitable comparator for adult standards at the lowest levels. Currently the standards start at too high a level and will exclude learning which takes place at what is currently described as ‘entry level.’ We recommend that Entry level 1 is rewritten at a lower level, e.g. reading “read and understand short, straightforward texts on familiar topics” be replaced with “read and understand familiar words, signs and symbols.”
- *Speaking and listening are different skills and should be dealt with separately.* The standards will need to provide ‘equivalent alternatives’ for people who cannot ‘speak’ and ‘listen’ due to their disabilities, but can still communicate through alternative means, such as sign language or assistive technology such as a voice synthesiser.
- *The curriculum to develop basic skills at entry level needs to be contextualised.* The standards recognise that skills should not be developed in isolation, but need to be relevant and related to individuals’ lifestyles and interests. We would strongly support the development of learning programmes and qualifications which contextualise the skills. Communication skills need to be developed in creative contexts to promote expressive abilities as well as in functional contexts.

IN ADDITION

We suggest that:

- the proposed standards, after adjustment, **be used as a basis for both key skills work and the work we call ‘basic skills’**
- separate, tailored programmes of learning and qualifications are used according to the needs of the key skills learner groups and the ‘basic skills’ learner groups
- the term ‘basic skills’ be changed, so that it sounds less low-level.

Suggested model



* need to find a new term

- We know that the separate but overlapping use of these terms ‘basic skills’, and ‘key skills’ is immensely confusing to learners, teachers, parents and the community at large. There would be widespread relief if the relationship could be clarified through the use of common standards which were not labelled ‘basic skills’.
- Key skills teachers may use the basic skills standards in order to identify the detail of the underpinning skills needed for the relevant key skill. This would be useful. Many key skills teachers will welcome the more technical and detailed information contained in the proposed standards in order to flesh out part A of the key skills specifications. This is another good reason for using the proposed standards, after adjustment, as the **basis** for both key skills and ‘basic skills’ curriculum and qualifications.
- Even if this radical proposal is not feasible, we would strongly suggest that the use of the term “progression” into key skills in the introduction to the standards is inappropriate. It could create the impression that:
 - the basic skills are at a lower level than their key skill counterparts
 - ‘basic skills’ work simply teaches underpinning skills in isolation and without context in order to prepare for the key skill at the same level.
(In fact, basic skills teachers will use the standards as the basis for a wide variety of contextualised teaching and learning which may well **not** lead into the key skills. The programmes of learning we currently call ‘basic skills’ are valid in their own right.)
- **If** we have to keep the overall distinction between ‘basic skills’ and key skills in the standards, then we propose that the key skills guidance documentation avoids using the term ‘basic skills’ to describe the acquisition of underpinning knowledge and understanding. This term has a much wider meaning for ‘basic skills’ specialists who use the same term to describe a whole post-16 curriculum area.
- We are concerned that the proposed basic skills standards are at a higher level than the equivalent key skill (please see response to L13/15 and N13/14 for details)
- FEDA urges QCA to consider the development of standards for IT and the wider key skills at Entry level in due course. These skills are already being taught to adults and we currently lack a suitable framework for ensuring consistency and rigour in this work.

To sum up, we believe that the standards should:

- be re-labelled as common communication standards which overtly underpin both basic skills and the key skills learning programmes and qualifications
- avoid the use of the phrase “progression into key skills”
- avoid the pitfall of using “basic skills” to mean underpinning knowledge and skills.

We also believe that the standards could provide the 'technical-speak' to underpin both key skills and 'basic' skills and accompany the 'learner-speak' nature of the new key skills specifications.

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In which of the following areas do you work:

Adult Literacy
Adult Numeracy
EAL/ESOL