

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

FEDA RESPONSE

Literacy Questionnaire

These standards draw extensively on the expectations and requirements of the national literacy strategy, the revised national curriculum for English and the new key skills specifications for communication. These standards also include specific aspects of literacy not found in some other frameworks. The adult focus of this work makes it essential that speaking, listening and responding are seen as comprising one of the key capabilities.

L1a

Are all of the skills that have been included relevant to adult literacy?

Yes, but:

- the title 'literacy standards' is not accurate
- the skills of listening and speaking need to be separated.

L1b

Please specify

- these are English Language and Literacy standards, or English Communication standards
- the separation of the listening and speaking skills is essential because 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.

L2a

Are there any capabilities missing which should be included?

Yes

L2b

Please specify

The reading and writing skills should include additional capabilities in relation to the graphical and navigational sub-skills necessary for the selection and use of IT generated information, such as that found on CD Roms and the Internet.

L3a

These standards identify the key capabilities of literacy and track their development and progression through the levels. Each capability has a set of descriptors which specify the knowledge, techniques and understanding that an adult is expected to possess and demonstrate

Is the progression of the literacy capabilities accurately defined by the standards?

Yes, although we have a reservation, specified in 3b below. Please retain the additional table describing progression in each skill in Annex 1. It is very useful in order to see the progression at work.

L3b

Please specify

The process of mapping the proposed national standards for adults to the national curriculum for English has created an Entry 1 which is too high to accommodate the needs of the many adults who:

- have never been in formal education
- have been unsuccessful in formal education
- have been out of education for a long time
- have learning difficulties and disabilities
- speak English as an additional language.

The current learner-referenced nature of Entry level, while loose and lacking in rigour, does at least enfranchise these groups of learners. We urge QCA to ensure that the new national framework does not disenfranchise them. The widely varying nature of adult starting points and the differential speed of learning means that the national curriculum is not a suitable comparator for adult standards at the lowest levels.

4a

Each level comprises key capabilities. Although these are separately specified, they are linked by sets of descriptors. The intention is for these descriptors to identify the links between listening, speaking, reading and writing at each level. Are the links between the skills that comprise literacy made clear and coherent by the standards?

The links are clear. However we believe that the option to develop these skills separately must be retained.

4b

What is unclear?

Any descriptors which require 'mixed skills' need to be removed, to avoid learners being penalised for a lower ability in a separate skill area. Once the listening and speaking skills have been separated there are very few instances of this problem occurring, although there are two descriptors in the current listening/speaking skills at level 1 and level 2 which require the learner to '*Identify and make notes of relevant information*' while listening to explanations and presentations. This requirement clearly combines listening and writing skills in a way which may disadvantage learners who have developed alternative strategies for remembering information to compensate for a low level of literacy or a disability which prevents them writing.

L5a

Are the divisions between the separate skills that comprise literacy logical and consistent in the standards?

No, see above

L5b

Please explain

As above, ie any descriptors which require ‘mixed skills’ need to be removed, to avoid learners being penalised for a lower ability in a separate skill area. Once the listening and speaking skills have been separated there are very few instances of this problem occurring, although there are two descriptors in the current listening/speaking skills at level 1 and level 2 which require the learner to *‘Identify and make notes of relevant information’* while listening to explanations and presentations. This requirement clearly combines listening and writing skills in a way which may disadvantage learners who have developed alternative strategies for remembering information to compensate for a low level of literacy or a disability which prevents them writing.

6a

Technical language is used where it is necessary to make the level descriptors precise. An attempt has been made to clarify the ‘pitch’ or ‘demand’ of each capability by contextualising individual descriptors wherever possible.

Are the increasing demands of each skill as it moves up the levels made clear by the standards?

Yes, the increasing demands are clear. However, FEDA recommends that the Entry 1 starts lower in order to provide a comprehensive framework, that speaking and listening be separated and that alternative modes are allowed for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities.

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.

6b

Please explain.

- *The standards need to be as inclusive as possible.* Currently they start at too high a level and will exclude learning which is taking 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 texts with repeated language patterns on familiar topics” could be replaced with “read and understand familiar words, signs and symbols.” The National Literacy Strategy document gives details of an approximately suitable level in its Reception Year section (page 18), though of course these descriptors would need to be contextualised and modified for adult learners.

- *Speaking and listening are different skills and should be dealt with separately (see above for explanation).*
- *The standards will need to provide 'equivalent alternatives.'* In order to be accessible to people with disabilities, a range of communication modes will need to be included as alternatives in the standards. For example, people who cannot 'speak' or 'listen' due to their disabilities, can still communicate through alternative means, such as sign language or assistive technology such as a voice synthesiser. The standards need to recognise this.

NB

- *In line with the guidance section in the standards, the basic skills **curriculum** and **qualifications** will also need to be contextualised.* As the format of the standards recognises, skills need to be developed and tested in ways which relate to individuals' lifestyles and interests. Communication skills need to be developed in creative contexts to promote expressive abilities as well as in functional contexts.

L7a

The range of literacy skills and the contexts and settings used and experienced by adults adds a dimension to the standards not necessarily found in existing frameworks or schemes associated with literacy development in schools.

Do the literacy standards accurately reflect how adults use language?

Yes, with provisos identified above, ie FEDA recommends that:

- Entry 1 skill descriptors and settings should start lower in order to provide a comprehensive framework
- speaking and listening be separated
- alternative modes are allowed for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities
- graphical, navigational and other skills associated with the use of technology need to be incorporated into the standards for reading and writing.

7b

Please explain

See above

L8

The balance between formal and informal uses of language in the standards is:

About right

L9

By giving examples, the guidance section seeks to clarify where adults may have opportunities to develop, practise and use these individual capabilities

Is the guidance section with examples helpful in clarifying the standards?

Yes, very helpful, providing the press and other agencies do not interpret the guidance as part of the specification for curriculum and tests (as the press has already started to do). The sentence which explains that this is **not** a list of what an adult must be able to do needs to be strongly stressed.

L10

Do you have any further suggestions or examples which should be included in the guidance section?

- IT based contexts
- cultural contexts (there need to be more exemplars covering the affective and creative sides of people's lives which help them to change and develop)
- storytelling
- negotiating one's own learning, developing autonomy, managing self-directed learning etc (Ufl and other changes in the culture of learning/teaching mean that students will need very well developed skills for negotiating and managing their own learning)

Sample work based contexts

Entry 1

- Listening to a telephone message and identifying the context
- Recognising internal signs in an office e.g. fire exit, kitchen
- Following emergency instructions – fire/evacuation

Entry 2

- Taking a message at work
- Giving information about availability
- Signing in at work or as a visitor
- Asking a straightforward question about a pay slip

Entry 3

- Listening to information from a customer and finding the right product
- Writing a simple memo or short letter at work
- Reading and responding to a straightforward request from a customer

Level 1

- Informing a manager about a current work situation
- Constructing a letter or memo presenting more than one type of information
- Participating in a group discussion
- Dealing with a visitor to the workplace

Level 2

- Handling a conflict of ideas or views
- Calming an unhappy customer
- Writing a letter with 3 or 4 issues to present
- Writing a short report on a workplace accident
- Introducing a new member of staff to colleagues

- Presenting a report to colleagues in a meeting

L11

The structure of the standards recognises that the development of skills and capabilities is uneven and depends upon the individual. The standards seek to reflect progression within the three sub-divisions of Entry level as well as the increase in demand between the full framework levels.

Do the degrees of difficulty between the levels seem equal?

Yes they do seem equal, but the process of benchmarking against the national curriculum Key Stages appears to have created inconsistencies of demand at level 1 and 2, ie the basic skills standards demand more sophisticated skills than the equivalent key skills (for examples see below)

L12

Are the skills and capabilities for each level of the literacy standards accurate?

Entry 1 Much too difficult (5)

Entry 2 Somewhat difficult (4)

Entry 3 Somewhat difficult (4)

Level 1 Somewhat difficult (4) - should be more closely referenced to key skills at level 1

Level 2 Somewhat difficult (4) - should be more closely referenced to key skills at level 2

L13a

The revised standards are intended to provide progression to the key skill of communication at levels 1 and 2. The literacy skills and capabilities provide the knowledge, techniques and understanding that underpin communication.

Are you familiar with the revised (2000) key skills specifications for communication?

Yes

L13b

Do the standards for literacy provide progression into the key skills specifications for communication at levels 1 and 2?

- This section of the introduction to the standards explains that "*the standards clearly specify the knowledge, techniques and understanding that underpin each key skill.*" The proposed basic skills standards are designed to be at the same level as the equivalent key skill. We therefore 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

Basic skills* qualifications	Key skills qualifications
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Basic skills* curriculum	Key skills curriculum
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Common standards

* 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" 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.

- The proposed basic skills standards are at a higher level than the equivalent key skill (please see response to L13 for details)

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.

L13c

Please explain

Level 1 Proposed descriptor	Problem	Proposed revision
Listening and speaking		
	Listening and speaking should be separated	Introduce receptive listening skills, parallel to the reading skills at each level between Entry 1 and Level 2 (listening for context, listening for gist, listening for information, sequencing etc). This needs detailed work – LL willing to contribute
Speak and listen to take account of themedium	Not in key communication level 1	Omit
Engage in discussion with one or more people	Key skill demands both 1:1 and group discussion	Introduce both 1:1 and group discussion to parallel key skill
Speak clearly <i>and confidently</i> in a way which suits the situation	<i>Confidently</i> is too demanding and too difficult to measure	Remove <i>and confidently</i>
Identify <i>and make notes of</i> relevant information from explanations or presentations	<i>Make notes of</i> ‘mixes’ listening and writing skills; this disadvantages learners with weaker writing skills or disabilities; they may have developed alternative strategies	Omit <i>make notes of</i>
Make contributions relevant to the subject <i>and give reasons for opinions</i>	Not in key skill communication level 1	
No reference to alternative strategies for learners with disabilities	Excludes learners with disabilities	Need caveat in standards which allows learners to use assistive technology where relevant
Reading		
Read and understand straightforward texts of varying length on a variety of topics <i>fluently</i> , accurately and independently	Not in key skill communication level 1 Difficult to measure Disenfranchises those with difficulties, such as dyslexia,	Omit

	who may never be able to read <i>fluently</i>	
Identify the main points and specific detail <i>and infer meaning which is not explicit</i>	Not in key skill communication level 1	Omit
Understand and use structural and organisational features of different types of text (paragraphs, sub-headings, layers in hypertext, etc)	Key skills communication level 1 includes 'images'	Add, images to the list
	Key skills level 1 includes <i>Prepare information so it is suitable for use</i>	Add <i>prepare information so it is suitable for use</i> with adult examples from guidance section
	Do we need additional examples on reading graphical information on screen, navigating Internet information etc?	Add additional sub-skills on reading graphical information on screen, navigating information etc?
Writing		
Use formal and informal language showing evidence of adaptation to purpose and audience	Key skills communication level 2 Too difficult	Use different forms of presenting information, eg letter, note, record, email
Use apostrophes correctly for omission	Key skills communication level 2 Too difficult	Omit
Spell most words correctly	Key skills communication level 2 Too difficult <i>Most words correctly too difficult to measure</i>	Replace with <i>Make meaning clear by writing, proof-reading and re-drafting documents so that words used most often are spelled correctly</i>
	Need to add spelling strategies	Use a range of strategies to correct spelling, such as a spell checker, a dictionary etc

Level 2 Proposed descriptor	Problem	Proposed revision
Listening and speaking		
	Listening and speaking should be separated	Introduce receptive listening skills, parallel to the reading skills at each level between Entry 1 and Level 2 (listening for context, listening for gist, listening for information, sequencing etc). This needs detailed work – am willing to contribute
Speak and listen to take account of the <i>medium</i>	Not in key communication level 2	Omit
Engage in discussion with one or more people	Key skill demands both 1:1 and group discussion	Introduce both 1:1 and group discussion in line with key skill
Speak clearly <i>and confidently</i> in a way which suits the situation	<i>Confidently</i> is too demanding and too difficult to measure	Remove <i>and confidently</i>
Identify <i>and make notes of</i> relevant information from explanations or presentations	<i>Make notes of</i> 'mixes' listening and writing skills; this disadvantages learners with weaker writing skills or disabilities; they may have developed alternative strategies	Omit <i>make notes of</i>
Follow instructions in a range of contexts, including <i>lengthy</i> or multi-step instructions	Neither explicit nor implicit in key skills communication level 2	Omit <i>lengthy</i>
<i>Justify opinions</i> and support arguments with evidence	Not in key skill communication level 2	Replace with <i>express ideas and opinions and use evidence to support them</i> in line with key skills communication level 2
Encourage others to participate in discussion	Key skills communication level 3	Omit
	Key skill communication level 2 asks learner to prepare and give a short talk	Add
No reference to alternative strategies for learners with disabilities	Excludes learners with disabilities	Need caveat in standards which allows learners to use assistive technology where relevant

Reading		
Read and understand a range of texts of varying complexity <i>fluently</i> , accurately and independently	Not in key skill communication level 2 Difficult to measure Disenfranchises those with difficulties, such as dyslexia, who may never be able to read <i>fluently</i>	Omit
	Key skills communication level 2 includes <i>use different sources to obtain relevant information</i>	Add
Identify the purpose of a text <i>and obtain meaning through inference and deduction</i>	Too difficult Need to include images	Replace with Identify the purpose of texts and images and <i>guess</i> meaning through inference and deduction
<i>Read critically for</i> evidence of manipulation, ambiguity and bias in writing which informs or persuades	Key skills communication level 3	Could include a modified version eg <i>Look for</i> evidence of manipulation, ambiguity and bias in etc
Read an argument and evaluate the points of view	Key skills communication level 3 Too difficult	Could include a modified version, eg Read an argument and <i>identify</i> the points of view
	Key skills level 2 includes <i>Use different sources to obtain relevant information</i>	Add <i>Use different sources to obtain relevant information</i> with adult examples from guidance section
	Do we need additional examples on reading graphical information on screen, navigating information etc?	Add additional sub-skills on reading graphical information on screen, navigating information etc?
Writing		
Use punctuation to clarify information and explanation (eg bullet points, <i>colons</i>)	Key skills communication level 3 Too difficult	Omit
Use a variety of verb tenses, form, person correctly and effectively, (eg conditional, modal, passive voice, third person)	Not specified in key skills communication level 2 Too difficult for speakers of other languages	Omit specifics or take advice on which are appropriate at this level

Spell accurately, including the use of familiar technical words	Not specified in key skills communication level 2 Too difficult	Replace with <i>Make meaning clear by writing, proof-reading and re-drafting documents so that words used most often are spelled correctly and spelling of irregular words is checked</i>
	Need to add spelling strategies	Use a range of strategies to correct spelling, such as a spell checker, a dictionary etc

L14

These standards recognise that some adults may never be able to meet certain aspects of the level descriptors, for example due to a specific difficulty or disability. It would be helpful to the developers of curricula and qualifications if these descriptors could be identified and alternative descriptors or means identified.

Please name the Entry level descriptors that may prove to be impossible and suggest alternative descriptors.

Entry 1 Proposed descriptor	Problem	Proposed revision
Listening and speaking		
	Listening and speaking should be separated	Introduce receptive listening skills, parallel to the reading skills at each level between Entry 1 and Level 2 (listening for context, listening for gist, listening for information, sequencing etc). This needs detailed work – am willing to contribute
Speak with appropriate loudness and clarity	Too difficult	Establish shared understanding with a sympathetic listener
Make requests using appropriate register	Too difficult	Make requests in everyday contexts
Get the gist of short explanations or presentations about familiar topics	Too difficult	Get the gist of statements and questions about familiar topics
Listen attentively and respond meaningfully to what others are saying	The terms “attentively” and “meaningfully” are open to a wide range of interpretations and difficult to assess	Listen and respond to what others are saying
No reference to alternative strategies for learners with disabilities	Excludes learners with disabilities	Need caveat in standards which allows learners to use assistive technology where relevant
Reading		
Read and understand short texts with repeated language patterns on familiar topics	Too difficult	Read and understand familiar words, signs and symbols
Follow a narrative on a familiar topic or experience	Too difficult	Read two or three simple sentences
Decode simple, regular words	Needs additional info	<i>Add, using phonic and/or word recognition strategies as appropriate to the learner</i>

	Additional skill?	Find words and /or symbols on a computer screen
Writing		
Use written words or phrases to record or present information	Too difficult	Use written words or phrases to record or present <i>straightforward</i> information
Write a simple sentence etc	Too difficult	<i>Copy</i> a simple sentence etc
... in documents such as records		... in documents such as <i>records of work</i>

L15

A glossary of terms to clarify the level descriptors is planned. Please identify any terms used in the literacy standards that you feel should be included in this.

Basic skills

Key skills

Skills vs Capabilities

Skimming

Scanning

Detailed reading

Listening for gist, listening for context

Listening for information

L16

Are there any other comments that you wish to make about the literacy standards?

We need to ensure that development work following the agreement of the standards offers learners the opportunity to develop skills (curriculum) and be tested (qualification) in 'bite-sized' chunks. This would mean that tests and other accreditation would not necessarily test the whole range of sub-skills at the same time.

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In which of the following areas do you work:

Adult Literacy

Adult Numeracy

EAL/ESOL

