

Skillsfirst Awards

Guide to teacher assessed grades for FS qualifications in 2021

April 2021

v1



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Introduction

In response to the outcome of the [Ofqual consultation on alternative arrangements for the award of VTQs and other general qualifications in 2021](#), this document sets out Skillsfirst's approach to Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGs) for the remainder of the academic year 2020–2021. This covers all Functional Skills assessments; legacy and reformed, English, mathematics and ICT Level 1 and Level 2.

Ofqual's proposed approach to Functional Skills assessments, in line with the directive from the Department for Education, is that all Functional Skills assessments should continue wherever possible, either face-to-face (where it is safe to do so in line with Public Health England guidance) or via remote invigilation. The Ofqual / DfE consultation outcome states "*...Functional Skills, have 'on-demand' shorter assessments. Where these can be delivered in line with public health measures, including remotely, the Department's policy position is that they should be permitted to continue to proceed. This is to ensure that learners can continue to progress fairly and acknowledges that providers have been implementing protective measures and adapting assessments such as moving to remote assessment.*

These qualifications are often taken on demand, with more frequent external examination and assessment opportunities throughout the year, and we do not see a strong rationale for preventing these assessments from continuing where they can be delivered in line with public health guidelines. A number of awarding organisations have recently invested in remote assessment solutions for FSQs. Therefore, the Department proposes that remote assessments should be taken by FSQ learners where these assessments can continue and learners are able to access them. For learners who are unable to access FSQ assessments, an alternative method of awarding these qualifications may be needed to ensure these learners can progress."

Functional Skills Qualifications (FSQs) will therefore offer a TAG option as a last resort only, for those learners that the centre expected to be entered for assessment between 1 August 2020 and 31 August 2021 only. TAGs can only be awarded where assessments cannot take place on public health grounds, or remotely, for learners who are assessment ready.

Teacher Assessed Grade (TAG) is the term used throughout this document to refer to the professional judgement made by teachers on the most likely grade a learner would have achieved, if learning had continued as normal.

Skillsfirst has been working closely with Ofqual and other awarding organisations (AOs) to agree common guidance for centres, this is confirmed in this document.

This document is intended to support centres to determine whether a learner is eligible for a TAG for an FSQ assessment.

The information in this document provides guidelines to support centres, however it is not exhaustive. Skillsfirst reserves the right to make discretionary judgements that may not be detailed within this document if they deem it necessary.

Please be aware this document is liable to change, therefore please ensure you are referring to the most recent version which is available on our website www.skillsfirst.co.uk

1. Principles of the arrangements for Functional Skills Teacher Assessed Grades

The following principles governing this process have been agreed by all AOs offering Functional Skills qualifications:

1. Live testing is the preferred method of assessment for FSQs therefore will continue. This testing could take place face-to-face or using adaptations such as being delivered remotely.
NB: remote invigilation must only be conducted by Skillsfirst, centres are not permitted to conduct this form of invigilation.
2. TAGs must only be submitted as a last resort for those learners:
 - i. that the centre expected to be entered for assessment between 1 August 2020 and 31 August 2021 only
 - ii. the learner's end date is in the past
 - iii. who are assessment ready
 - iv. where assessments cannot take place on public health grounds, or remotely
 - v. who are deemed to be eligible with suitable evidence to support a pass grade against the assessment.
3. As live testing must be the primary method of awarding, TAGs must only be requested when centres can clearly demonstrate learners are assessment ready
4. Centres must investigate all live testing and adaptation options before approaching Skillsfirst with an application for a TAG. Centres will be required to evidence how all options have been explored and exhausted for each individual learner / assessment.
5. Learner eligibility must be determined by the centre in line with Skillsfirst's criteria defined in Section 2.1.
6. Centres are not permitted to submit TAGs for whole cohorts.
7. Skillsfirst reserves the right to review evidence used by centres to reach judgements about TAGs upon request. This may be through quality assurance of the centre's submission and / or through routine external quality assurance activities.
8. Centres must retain suitable evidence, of both a learner's eligibility and what has been used to support TAG judgements for all learners, for a minimum of 3 years.
9. Skillsfirst will take all reasonable steps to support centres in resolving quality assurance queries about a centre's submission, but as a last resort may reject the submission.
10. In line with Ofqual's VCRF regulatory framework, TAG arrangements will remain in place until 31 August 2021.
11. It is expected that for a range of reasons related to the current situation, some learners may not be eligible for a TAG. These may include for example:
 - The learner has the ability to take the assessment either face-to-face or remotely
 - The learner is not assessment ready
 - The centre does not have sufficient evidence to support a pass grade against the assessment
 - The learner is not expected to be entered for the assessment between 1 August 2020 and 31 August 2021

In such cases, every effort will be made to minimise disadvantage to learners, but delaying assessment may be unavoidable.

2. Scope

This guidance covers the following qualifications.

Legacy Functional Skills Level 1 and 2 qualifications:

- Mathematics
- English
- ICT

Reformed Functional Skills Level 1 and 2 qualifications:

- Mathematics
- English

The timescales below should help centres to plan staff resource to support with the TAG process.

Date	Process
21 April – 21 June 2021	Window for submission of TAG judgement(s)
21 April – 11 August 2021	Skillsfirst external quality assurance checks are conducted
12 August 2021	TAG results released

2.1 Learner eligibility

Centres should only submit TAGs for learners affected by the Covid-19 disruption.

This is defined as learners the centre expected to be entered for assessment between 1 August 2020 and 31 August 2021 only.

This includes:

- learners attempting the assessment / exam for the first time
- learners resitting the assessment. It is acknowledged that learners may have both attempted for the first time and resat an exam /assessment during this period.

Centres must **NOT** submit TAGs for any learner they would not expect to have taken the exam / assessment during this period.

Live testing, either remotely or in person, remains available throughout the period and must always be the primary option. Assessments can take place in centre, in the workplace, or in an alternative venue suitable for assessments to be conducted in examination conditions. Adaptations to delivering live tests have been made so centres **must** explore and exhaust all these options before considering a TAG for any learner. There is a clear expectation from DfE that TAGs will be an exception process rather than the 'norm' for Functional Skills qualifications. Therefore, eligibility for a learner to be **considered** for a TAG has to be clearly established, by the centre, **before** any teacher judgement based on supporting evidence is considered.

A learner who has completed their course of study must only be considered for a TAG application provided the centre can demonstrate:

- the learner's end date is in the past
- the learner would have been eligible for a TAG at the time they intended to take a live test
- the centre has supporting evidence to demonstrate the learner was assessment ready
- the centre can demonstrate it is not safe to invite the learner back to take a test and has explored all possible adaptations to test.

Evidence of all of the above points must be retained by the centre for each learner. Skillsfirst may request to review these before, or after approving a TAG.

Centres must demonstrate that normal assessment arrangements are not safe and that the learner cannot:

- access an assessment face-to-face
- access an assessment utilising adaptations such as remote invigilation, or assessment
- delay the assessment.

A key part of the eligibility judgement must be a consideration of when each learner requires the result and, working back from the end date when the result is required, whether there is likely to be a clear opportunity for the learner to access a live test safely in any way before that date.

Centres will need to clearly justify why each learner is eligible for a TAG, providing clear evidence of the options they have explored to access live testing for each learner.

Where centres can demonstrate that they have explored all possible options for each individual learner to take a live test, including all possible adaptations that have been put in place, then centres may proceed with an application to submit TAGs for each individual learner to Skillsfirst.

2.2 TAG evidence

To apply to use a TAG, a learner must be assessment ready, the centre must have evidence which can be used to inform a TAG judgement. Centres must also have evidence to demonstrate why that learner is unable to access a live test for safety reasons.

Provided centres can evidence:

- the efforts made to live test
- the learner's readiness to take an assessment
- the body of evidence that is used to support a TAG judgement

then a TAG application can be submitted to Skillsfirst for consideration.

The following criteria will support eligibility judgements. Centres will need to have clear records in place which may be reviewed as part of Skillsfirst's external quality assurance process, to provide reassurance that the learners selected are eligible and any outcomes are robust and a true reflection of the learner's achievement.

Requirements for a TAG application	Evidence to support a TAG application
<p>Reason why learner is eligible including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • why a learner cannot take a live test • why a learner needs a result now • the learner is assessment ready 	<p>Rationale from the centre to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clear evidence to demonstrate efforts to live test (both face-to-face and remotely) • learner and / or employer statement to confirm why access to the assessment is restricted • need for a result by a set date to support progression • readiness for assessment between 1 August 2020 and 31 August 2021 • criterion for reasonable adjustments and the rationale to support eligibility
<p>Supporting evidence for the TAG:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The centre must have a body of evidence that a teacher can use to form the basis of their TAG judgement. 	<p>Recommended evidence includes, but is not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • completed practice paper taken as a mock test, including confirmation of the test conditions the mock test was taken under • formative assessment results <p>This could be further supported by other evidence which may include, but is not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • any other learner work towards the qualification (i.e. work they have independently undertaken in class or at home) • learner work demonstrating the skills assessed with the FS qualification that has been completed in support of another qualification learning aim
<p>Supporting the TAG:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the evidence, the teacher can confirm that they believe the learner would have passed the assessment. 	<p>In addition to the evidence described above, we would expect commentary from the teacher using the agreed pass descriptors to demonstrate how the evidence aligns to support the TAG judgement.</p>

The use of practice assessments is not mandated, however Skillsfirst **highly recommend** the use of this material as a key part of any supporting evidence, as these tests have been produced by Skillsfirst and are therefore recognised as a standardised source of evidence.

Practice assessments and the mark scheme applied must be those provided by Skillsfirst. Whilst the conditions the practice assessment was taken in are not mandated, centres must

consider the conditions through which this evidence is gathered and should implement measures to ensure they are confident that the evidence is authentic to each learner, and that the evidence is reliable and comparable to those going through live testing.

Centres must record the conditions under which the evidence was produced, and where evidence has been gathered without control, they should include other supporting evidence to corroborate this to provide reassurances of the learner's overall ability to achieve the component / qualification. Where evidence gathered is outside of the teacher's control, a recorded discussion should be held with the learner to confirm it is their own work.

2.3 Component submissions

Centres must submit TAGs at component level for each learner.

Functional Skills English qualifications at each level (Level 1 and Level 2) comprise of three separately-assessed components: Reading; Writing and Speaking, Listening and Communication. This applies to both legacy and reformed Functional Skills English qualifications

Functional Skills Mathematics qualifications at each level (Level 1 and Level 2) comprise of one component. This applies to both legacy and reformed Functional Skills Mathematics qualifications.

Assessment for reformed Functional Skills Mathematics consists of a single component assessed in two parts, a non-calculator and a calculator section.

Functional Skills ICT at each level (Level 1 and Level 2) comprise of one component.

3. Centre responsibilities

3.1 Role of the Head of Centre

The TAG process for Functional Skills qualifications must be overseen and approved by the Head of Centre, in the form of a Head of Centre declaration.

The Head of Centre's responsibilities are to ensure:

- All eligible learners are registered on the appropriate Functional Skills qualification(s) before TAGs are submitted to Skillsfirst
- They have explored all possible avenues to live test each learner either remotely, or in person utilising all available adaptations for the learners being submitted for TAGs
- They are only entering TAGs for learners who are eligible and have a valid reason of safety concerns as to why they cannot access live assessment
- They have supporting evidence available for each learner / component that underpins a judgement and supports the award of a TAG
- They have adhered to the process defined by Skillsfirst in relation to TAG arrangements
- The approach the centre has taken to making judgements e.g. the evidence that has been used to base their judgements on, is standardised and consistent
- A TAG internal verification strategy is produced and has been fully implemented
- The TAG internal verification strategy is submitted to Skillsfirst as part of the TAG submission
- They have internally quality assured **all** decisions made in relation to TAGs and the approach they took is in line with their TAG internal verification strategy
- They have compared the volume of achievement for their submissions against previous years.

The centre must complete a robust internal quality assurance (IQA) process, demonstrating all judgements have been standardised before TAGs are submitted.

The centre must retain the supporting evidence for both eligibility and TAG judgements. Skillsfirst may request to review all, or some evidence, as part of our external quality assurance process to verify the outcomes of learners.

Once the process has been completed, the Head of Centre must sign off the submission covering all Functional Skills learners whose TAGs they are submitting. Sign off is in the form of a declaration (supplied by Skillsfirst) that the process has been followed in full. The Head of Centre should provide as much narrative as possible to support submissions, including any disparages, in relation to historic achievement rates and the achievement profile of the TAGs.

The Head of Centre declaration must be submitted at the time of a TAG submission.

Failure to follow this process, produce evidence upon request, or any false declarations may result in a malpractice / maladministration investigation and or sanction applied in line with Skillsfirst's policies.

TAGs must not be submitted for any learner where there is no valid evidence on which to base the judgement.

The Head of Centre declaration includes for all learners and components:

- confirmation that TAGs have been submitted for learners the centre expected to be entered for assessment between 1 August 2020 and 31 August 2021 only
- assurance that each learner meets the eligibility criteria for a TAG
- assurance that valid evidence has been used for each learners TAG judgement (for each component)
- confirmation that the Head of Centre has overseen a sense check comparing the numbers and proportions of TAGs for each component
- a description of any factors which account for divergence between historic achievement rates and the achievement profile of TAGs for each component
- total number of learners for whom a TAG has been judged

As part of a final sense check ahead of submitting TAGs to Skillsfirst, the Head of Centre must oversee a comparison for all components between:

- the number of TAGs submitted for each component
- the number of pass results they submitted for each component for an equivalent historic period (eg 1 August 2019 – 31 August 2020). Approximate figures may be used where it is not possible to generate exact figures.

Any variance between the two, for any component included in the submission, should be accounted for.

3.2 Internal quality assurance and standardisation

We require the appropriate teacher to make the TAG judgement for each eligible learner. Another suitably qualified individual within the centre will be required to internally quality assure the TAG, to ensure they agree with the judgement made based on available evidence and in line with the centre's internal quality assurance TAG process. This would ideally be the Head of Department, or someone who usually conducts the role of IQA for Functional Skills.

Where a staff member might have a personal interest in a learner, Head of Centre should make sure that additional controls are in place, as appropriate. The internal quality assurance process must be undertaken for each learner / component.

In some cases, it may be considered that a learner would have been on the borderline between passing and failing the assessment, but the teacher may feel unable to reach a definitive judgement. In such cases it is recommended that:

- where possible, such cases are discussed as part of standardisation
- particular attention is paid to the pass descriptor provided by Skillsfirst (where this is available for the component being considered)
- comparison is made between the evidence for that learner and evidence considered for other learners felt to be around the borderline, but where it has been possible to reach a pass decision.

Where there is more than one teacher responsible for delivering a component within the centre and involved in judging TAGs for that component, these teachers must work together to standardise their judgements.

For the standardisation of judgements, to begin with teachers should individually consider an initial sample of learners and make provisional judgements about whether each would pass.

Teachers should collaborate to discuss and compare their TAGs judgements, the evidence used, and the judgement applied, and reach agreement about the characteristics of pass learners. The teachers should then complete judgement for all learners, but may wish to standardise decisions with colleagues as required.

3.3 Reasonable adjustments

Centres must take into consideration a learners pre-approved reasonable adjustment when making a TAG judgment. Centres must demonstrate they explored the option of face-to-face invigilation and where applicable remote invigilation as part of this process.

TAG judgements made for eligible learners who have SEND or protected characteristics, must have input from specialist teachers. The input from specialist teachers will ensure that the teacher has considered the learners potential achievement, had they have sat the actual assessment in normal examination conditions, with approved reasonable adjustments in place. This requirement must form part of the centre's internal quality assurance of TAG judgements to ensure that learners are not disadvantaged.

Centres must take this into account when learners are completing any tasks which may contribute to the evidence required for a TAG. For example, if a learner is completing a practice paper, the centre should consider whether a reasonable adjustment being available to a learner would have impacted the outcome of the result. If a learner has failed a practice paper marginally, had the agreed reasonable adjustment been available to the learner, would this have changed the assessment outcome to a pass? If so, the centre must be able to demonstrate this and allow the learner's TAG judgement to be a pass.

3.4 Appeals

Centres must ensure their Appeals Policy is reviewed and updated, providing learners with the opportunity to appeal if they feel they are eligible for a TAG and, or the TAG judgement has been incorrectly judged by centre staff. These arrangements must be accessible to all learners and allow a learner to review the TAG result on the grounds that either the centre did not follow its TAG policy correctly, or an admin error was made when submitting the TAG result to Skillsfirst.

The centres Appeals Policy must be made available to Skillsfirst upon request.

Skillsfirst has an [Appeals Policy](#) in place which explains that learners are only able to appeal internal assessment decisions with the centre, although it is possible, with Skillsfirst's agreement, that the External Verifier could be the final point of arbitration.

3.5 Complaints

Centres must ensure their complaints policy is reviewed and updated, providing learners with the opportunity to complain if they feel they are eligible for a TAG and, or the TAG judgement has been incorrectly judged by centre staff. These arrangements must be accessible to all learners.

4. Evidence and making TAG decisions

4.1 Types of evidence

For each learner, the teacher judging the TAG must consider all available valid evidence which demonstrates the learner's progress towards the learning aims of the qualification. The evidence should be used in conjunction with the teacher's professional expertise, to form a judgement about whether the learner would pass the component. All available evidence should be used and the minimum requirement for judging a learner's TAG, is that there must be at least one piece of valid evidence available.

The following forms of evidence should be used to support judgement, where these are available:

- results of centre-marked attempts at Skillsfirst Functional Skills practice assessments which has been internally quality assured
- results of mock Speaking, Listening and Communication assessments which have been internally quality assured
- previous attempts at a live exam (based on feedback previously supplied by Skillsfirst after failed exams), together with additional learning evidence
- on-programme learning evidence
- formative assessment results. Formative assessment is defined as assessment undertaken to check learning has taken place and assess progress towards the Functional Skills level. This can be centre-devised or a commercially-available product. This does **not** include initial and diagnostic assessment (see below)
- any other learner work towards the qualification (ie work they have independently undertaken in class or at home)
- learner work demonstrating the skills assessed by Functional Skills qualifications that has been completed in support of another qualification learning aim
- assessor records

Results of initial and diagnostic assessment can be used, but only in the following ways:

- as a benchmark to gauge progress made towards the component requirements by the learner
- where this provides evidence that the learner had already met one or more of the component's assessed requirements, at the point at which the initial / diagnostic assessment was taken

Other forms of evidence may be acceptable, but it is recommended that the centre discusses these with Skillsfirst before judging TAGs.

It is acknowledged that these forms of evidence would not normally be considered in assessing these qualifications. It is also acknowledged that available evidence may only show partial achievement. Teachers will need to exercise judgement and discretion in reaching decisions about whether a learner would have passed. This includes a judgement where learning has been disrupted, about whether the learner would have passed had they completed the full programme of learning.

Centres should bear in mind the learner's progression aim when judging a 'pass' TAG result and recognise that this means that they believe the learner would be able to progress to the next Functional Skills level, or operate in an employment setting in respect of the skills that will be certificated.

4.2 Guidance for teachers judging learners' TAGs

Teachers should identify eligible learners **before** starting the process of judging learner TAGs.

The teacher should consider each eligible learner in turn. For each learner whose TAG is being judged, the teacher should consider:

- the assessment requirements of the component
- at least one piece of valid evidence that demonstrates the learner's progress towards the assessment requirements of the component
- the pass descriptor for the component being considered (where available)
- their knowledge of the learner's ability
- any reasonable adjustment that would have been made to the assessment for that learner in respect of a disability.

A learner's TAG should only be judged by teachers with direct experience of teaching that learner the subject and component for which the TAG is being judged. Where more than one teacher is responsible for teaching a learner a component, these teachers should work together to reach a judgement about the learner's TAG.

Where more than one teacher is responsible for teaching a subject / component at a particular level, they should work together to standardise their judgement in the way described below.

- Judgements must be made in an impartial, balanced and unbiased way; such that the assessment grades are based on evidence of attainment and avoid bias as far as is possible, so that learners are not systematically advantaged or disadvantaged by having, or not having, a protected characteristic or any other factor (for example character, appearance, social background or special educational needs) that does not relate to their knowledge, skills and abilities in relation to the subject. Protected characteristics are defined by the 2010 Equality Act as, age; disability; gender reassignment; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation; marriage and civil partnership and pregnancy and maternity. In addition to protected characteristics judged.

4.3 Before judging TAGs

Teachers should be familiar with:

- The guidance on the process issued by Skillsfirst
- The standards for the Functional Skills subject and level being assessed, these can be accessed from Ofqual's website:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/functional-skills-qualifications-requirements> For legacy Functional Skills qualifications (ie Mathematics and English pre September 2019 and ICT) the relevant legacy criteria should be used. For

Mathematics and English learners from September 2019, the standards are published within the Conditions and Requirements documents as appendices.

- For legacy and reformed Mathematics and English at levels 1 and 2, the awarding organisation common pass descriptors (Appendix A).

4.4 Completing the TAGs judgement process

When TAGs have been judged for all learners / components eligible, the following should be recorded on the spreadsheet provided by Skillsfirst for **all** learners judged to have passed the relevant component(s):

- centre name
- Skillsfirst centre number
- learner name (as registered with Skillsfirst)
- Skillsfirst learner number
- date of birth
- qualification title / level
- Skillsfirst qualification number
- component
- pass grade
- reason for learner eligibility
- type(s) of evidence used to confirm learner eligibility
- type(s) of evidence used for TAG judgement
- conditions assessment(s) were taken in
- name of assessor and internal quality assurer
- any approved reasonable adjustment and what type

The TAG judgement(s) for each learner should be passed to the Head of Centre for checking prior to submission to Skillsfirst.

4.5 Sharing TAGs with learners

To protect the integrity and validity of the TAG process, you **must not** share your TAG judgement with learners until the result is confirmed by Skillsfirst.

5. Submitting TAGs to Skillsfirst

5.1 Centre submission process

Once the process has been fully completed, the Head of Centre must review and sign off the TAG judgement(s) for each learner included in the submission. Sign off is in the form of a Head of Centre declaration provided by Skillsfirst (Appendix B).

The TAG submission will be in two parts:

- 1) The following should be sent to exams@skillsfirst.co.uk by the Head of Centre:
 - Head of Centre declaration
 - Skillsfirst TAG result spreadsheet confirming the TAG results included in the submission (section 4.4)
 - TAG internal verification strategy
- 2) Submission of each learners' result into the XAMS platform (further guidance will be provided week beginning 19 April 2021)

The window for the submission of TAGs is 21 April – 21 June 2021.

Skillsfirst do not require centres to submit evidence as part of the initial TAG submission process. However, Skillsfirst reserves the right to sample some, or all of your TAG submission evidence upon request either during, or following the processing of your TAG submission.

Centres must retain all TAG evidence for a minimum period of three years.

5.2 Skillsfirst external quality assurance of TAG submissions

All TAG submissions will be subject to an external quality assurance check, carried out by a Skillsfirst representative.

Our rationale for our approach to external quality assurance is a risk-based approach.

Skillsfirst external quality assurance process for each TAG submission will include a review of:

- Learner eligibility to receive a TAG
- Evidence types used by the centre for each learner / component
- Overall centre risk rating
- Centre history of investigations / incidents in the last 18 months
- Direct claim status
- Reasonable adjustments
- Certificates issued for the same period from the previous year
- Functional Skills data and centre pass achievement rates for the same period from previous years

If we identify any concerns which are not sufficiently addressed in the Head of Centre declaration, we will contact you to discuss our concerns and ask you to review your TAG

submission, or provide further clarification or evidence. If it is not possible to resolve our queries with you, we will not be able to accept your submission and in these cases, adaptation or delay may be unavoidable.

We may ask centres to reconsider and/or justify their TAGs and if necessary, provide Skillsfirst with further evidence to support their decisions. For example, where we can see a learner was scheduled for a proctored / face to face exam, but then cancelled and included in a TAG submission. There may be other scenarios which we may have to consider.

We will take all reasonable steps to support centres in resolving quality assurance queries about their submission, but as a last resort may reject all, or part of the submission.

Skillsfirst reserves the right to sample some or all of your TAG submission evidence, including learner eligibility, evidence used to form the judgement, reasonable adjustments etc. Where applicable, the Head of Centre will be contacted by a Skillsfirst representative.

6. TAG results

All TAG submissions will be processed by Skillsfirst in chronological order.

TAG results will be issued once we have completed our external quality assurance process. In line with the Government's policy, all results will be issued on or before 12 August 2021.

TAG results will be released via the XAMS platform.

7. Guidance on the pass descriptors

7.1 Mathematics and English Reading and Writing Level 1 and 2

Pass descriptors have been provided for Mathematics, English Reading and English Writing at level 1 and 2 (Appendix A). These should be used by teachers making TAG judgements for these components for both legacy and reformed Functional Skills qualifications. These are used to help ensure a common understanding of the minimum requirement for a pass for each component.

As part of the process leading to the implementation of reformed Functional Skills qualifications from September 2019, Functional Skills awarding organisations worked together to develop an approach to standardise awarding of the Functional Skills qualification components assessed through an exam.

Awarding organisations separately considered exam scripts for these components and noted the characteristics demonstrated by learners who had achieved the same total number of marks as the exam pass mark (e.g. learners who achieved 28 marks where the pass mark was 28 out of 40). This is defined as a 'minimally-competent' learner.

Awarding organisations then came together to agree common descriptors of the skills and capabilities typically demonstrated by a 'minimally-competent' learner.

It was noted, and this is acknowledged by the descriptors, that not all minimally competent learners are the same and that in some cases, weak performance against some of the assessed requirements is compensated for by strong performance against other requirements. Teachers should apply this consideration in reaching judgement.

These common descriptors are used by Functional Skills AOs as part of their process for setting exam pass marks in order to support:

- a common interpretation of the standard required in order to pass the exam
- consistency between the pass standard required for legacy and reformed qualifications.

The evidence used to develop the descriptors was taken from assessments for legacy qualifications and they are used to support awarding for reformed qualifications. Therefore, these are appropriate and should be used to support judgements for both legacy and reformed assessments.

7.2 Reformed assessments

For reformed assessments, the descriptors are being kept under review and it is planned that further work will take place to consider requirements that have been added or revised as part of the Functional Skills reform. At the present time, this work has been suspended on account of the Covid-19 disruption. At the point in time at which the disruption took place, the reformed qualifications had only been established for about 6 months. This means that evidence is incomplete and still emerging about the reformed pass standard and where awarding for reformed assessments has taken place, this will have taken into account unfamiliar aspects of the new specifications.

The following guidance is given in respect of this:

- Throughout the Functional Skills qualification reform programme, Ofqual have given AOs guidance that while aspects of the requirements for each component have changed, there was no steer from Government that the *overall standard* required to pass any Functional Skills qualification assessment should change.
- For awards made so far for reformed Functional Skills qualifications, Ofqual has asked AOs to take into consideration any impacts on achievement caused by the relative unfamiliarity of the requirements of reformed Functional Skills qualifications and to take these into consideration in setting pass marks. In practice, where there is evidence of such impacts, this means that pass marks may be set a few marks below where these would be set for a more established qualification. It was expected that this process of the new requirements becoming established would have continued throughout the first year of the reformed qualifications and this includes the period for which TAGs are judged. Teachers judging TAGs should therefore apply a similar judgement in judging learners TAGs for reformed Functional Skills assessments.

Appendix A - Pass descriptors

Level 1 Functional Skills Qualification in Mathematics

Problem Solving

The learner has demonstrated that they can:

- understand practical problems in familiar and unfamiliar contexts and situations, some of which are non-routine
- identify and obtain necessary information to tackle the problem.
- select mathematics in an organised way to find solutions.
- apply mathematics in an organised way to find solutions to straightforward practical problems for different purposes.
- use appropriate checking procedures and at each stage, interpret and communicate solutions to practical problems, drawing simple conclusions and giving explanations.
- use appropriate checking procedures at each stage.
- interpret and communicate solutions to practical problems, drawing simple conclusions and giving explanations.

Learners will be able to engage with straightforward problems, but may not always choose the most logical approach to resolving these. They should be able to use the required level of accuracy and may be able to use strategies to check their answers.

More limited performance on some problems is compensated by strong performance on other problems.

Underpinning skills

The learner has demonstrated that they have a secure understanding and accurate application of the level 1 skills specified in each of the three content areas of number and the number system, measure shape and space and statistics and data. Performance may be limited in a few of more peripheral and less familiar aspects of one or more content area.

Level 2 Functional Skills Qualification in Mathematics

Problem Solving

The learner has demonstrated that they can:

- understand routine and non-routine problems in familiar and non-familiar situation situations and identify and select the maths needed to solve the problems
- apply a range of mathematics to find solutions.
- use appropriate checking procedures and evaluate their effectiveness at each stage
- interpret and communicate solutions
- draw conclusions and provide mathematical justifications.

Learners will be able to use maths within problems, but their approach may not always be the most logical or economic. They will know most of the formulae they need to recall. They will be able to find the required accuracy in most cases and should be able to show checking strategies when required.

For at least some multi-stage practical problems with more limited performance in some problems compensated for by stronger performance in other problems.

Underpinning Skills

The learner has demonstrated secure understanding and accurate application of the level 2 skills specified in each of the three content areas of number and the number system, measure shape and space and statistics and data.

Performance may be limited in a few of more peripheral and less familiar aspects of one or more content area.

Functional Skills Qualification in English Writing

Writing Level 1

The learner has demonstrated that they can write texts:

- for a range of given purposes and audiences
- of sufficient length
- containing some relevant appropriate information, ideas and opinions
- containing an appropriate level of detail
- that convey these with some degree of clarity and coherence
- that present information with some logical sequence
- that evidence some attempt to write in paragraphs
- that use elements of a recognisably appropriate format
- that use language mostly suitable for purpose and audience
- that use a range of sentence structures with some accuracy.

The learner can produce written work that includes acceptably accurate punctuation, spelling and grammar including generally consistent use of tense with overall clear meaning.

Acceptable accuracy means at least some degree of accuracy in each of spelling, punctuation or grammar and where more limited accuracy in one of these areas is compensated for by stronger performance in one or more of the others.

Writing Level 2

The learner has demonstrated that they can write texts:

- for a range of given purposes and audiences
- of sufficient length
- containing some relevant appropriate information, ideas and opinions
- containing an appropriate level of detail
- that convey these with some degree of clarity and conciseness/persuasiveness
- that are consciously/recognisably structured/logically sequenced
- that evidence some attempt to write in paragraphs
- that use a recognisably appropriate format
- that use language mostly suitable for purpose and audience
- that use a range of sentence structures with some accuracy.

The learner can punctuate written text with an acceptable degree of accuracy and produce written work that is fit for purpose with acceptable accuracy in spelling and grammar.

Acceptable accuracy means at least some degree of accuracy in each of spelling, punctuation or grammar and where more limited accuracy in one of these areas is compensated for by stronger performance in one or more of the others.

Functional Skills Qualification in English Reading

Reading Level 1

The learner has demonstrated that they can:

- identify the purposes of texts
- identify main points and some details of texts
- extract information to give some straightforward responses to texts
- identify some organisational features used by writers

The learner has demonstrated at least some ability to understand texts in detail and to identify suitable responses to these.

Reading Level 2

The learner has demonstrated that they can:

- identify the purposes of texts
- identify main points and specific details of texts
- extract, compare and exemplify information, ideas and opinions in different texts
- identify, compare and exemplify points of view in different texts
- identify and exemplify language techniques and organisational features used by writers
- identify and explain implicit and inferred meaning
- recognise and exemplify bias, and compare degrees of bias
- analyse and compare texts in relation to purpose and audience need.

The learner has demonstrated at least some awareness of how meaning is conveyed in written documents and at least some ability to analyse texts in relation to audience needs.

Appendix B – Head of Centre declaration

Teacher assessed grades for Functional Skills qualifications

Head of Centre declaration

Centre name:	
Skillsfirst centre number:	
Name of Head of Centre:	

The teacher assessed grade (TAG) process for Functional Skills qualifications must be overseen and signed off by the Head of Centre.

By completing and submitting this declaration to Skillsfirst, as Head of Centre I confirm the following:

- the TAG process has been followed in full as specified in Skillsfirst’s Guide to Teacher Assessed Grades for FS Qualifications in 2021
- all eligible learners are registered on the appropriate Functional Skills qualification(s)
- TAG judgements have only been submitted for learners who would have taken an assessment between 1 August 2020 and 31 August 2021 and who are assessment ready
- all possible avenues to live test each learner either remotely, or in person, utilising all available adaptations for the learners being submitted for TAGs have been explored
- only TAGs for learners who are eligible and have a valid reason of safety concerns as to why they cannot access live assessment have been submitted
- at least one piece of valid evidence for both eligibility and TAG judgements is available for each learner / component, that underpins a TAG and will be retained for a minimum of three years
- a TAG internal verification strategy has been produced and fully implemented
- the approach the centre has taken to making TAG judgements e.g. the evidence that has been used to base your judgements on, has been standardised and is consistent
- all TAG decisions have been internally quality assured in line with your TAG internal verification strategy
- you understand the TAG internal verification strategy must be submitted to Skillsfirst as part of this submission
- for all components where a TAG is submitted, only staff with experience of teaching that component to the learner(s) have judged the TAGs
- only centre staff who taught a learner were involved in judging that learner’s TAG(s)
- where more than one member of staff was involved in teaching an individual learner for any component, that these members of staff worked together to agree the TAG
- where more than one member of staff were responsible for teaching any Functional Skills component, that these staff worked together to standardise their judgements
- a minimum of at least one piece of evidence per learner, per component has been used to reach the TAG judgement(s)
- in relation to any learner who has an agreed reasonable adjustment, the teacher judgements have taken into consideration the impact on the learner of any lack of

that adjustment in producing any evidence which is used to inform the TAG for the learner and is satisfied the evidence is sufficient to support a grade

- judgements were evidence-based and as far as possible, free of any bias in respect of any learner with a protected characteristic, or any other factor (for example character, appearance, social background or special educational needs) that does not relate to their knowledge, skills and abilities in relation to the subject
- TAGs have not been submitted for any learner who is not eligible for a TAG
- TAGs have not been submitted for any learner where there is no, or insufficient valid evidence on which to base the judgement
- You have overseen a sense check comparing the volume of pass achievements included in the TAG submission against
 - the number of TAGs submitted for each component and
 - the number of pass results submitted for each component for an equivalent historic period (eg 1 August 2019 – 31 August 2020)
- I have provided a description of any factors which account for divergence between historic pass achievement rates and the achievement profile of the TAGs (if applicable)

Please provide the following information for each component / qualification included in the TAG submission:

<p>Total number of learners for whom a 'pass' TAG has been judged:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legacy FS English Level 1; Reading • Legacy FS English Level 1; Writing • Legacy FS English Level 1; SLC • Legacy FS English Level 2; Reading • Legacy FS English Level 2; Writing • Legacy FS English Level 2; SLC • Legacy FS Maths Level 1 • Legacy FS Maths Level 2 • FS ICT Level 1 • FS ICT Level 2 • Reformed FS English Level 1; Reading • Reformed FS English Level 1; Writing • Reformed FS English Level 1; SLC • Reformed FS English Level 2; Reading • Reformed FS English Level 2; Writing • Reformed y FS English Level 2; SLC • Reformed FS Maths Level 1 • Reformed FS Maths Level 2 	
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Please indicate the types of valid evidence used to confirm learners' eligibility (*please tick (or highlight) as appropriate*):

- Evidence to demonstrate efforts to live test for each learner / component
- Learner and / or employer statements to confirm why access to the assessment is restricted
- Readiness for assessment between 1 August 2020 and 31 August 2021
- Need for a result by a set date to support progression
- Criterion for reasonable adjustments and the rationale to support eligibility
- Other

Please indicate the types of valid evidence used to make the TAG judgements (*please tick (or highlight) as appropriate*):

- Completed practice papers including results, IQA records and confirmation of the test conditions the mock test was taken under
- On-programme learning evidence
- Work learners have independently undertaken in class or at home
- Assessor records
- Evidence of additional teaching that has taken place after failed exams
- Mock SLC assessment results, IQA records and confirmation of the test conditions the mock assessment was taken under
- Learner work demonstrating the skills assessed within the FS qualification that has been completed in support of another qualification learning aim
- Formative assessment, such as marked exercises and assignments which are carried out after a teaching session
- Commentary from the teacher using the agreed pass descriptors to demonstrate how the evidence aligns to support the TAG judgement
- Other

If you selected 'other' for either eligibility or types of valid evidence, please specify what evidence has been used for each component.

If applicable, provide a description of any factors which account for any disparities, in relation to historic pass achievement rates and the achievement profile of the TAGs for each component / qualification.

Name of Head of Centre: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Glossary

Term	Definition
Teacher assessed grade (TAG)	The professional judgement made by teachers on the most likely grade a learner would have achieved, if learning had continued as normal. These grades are submitted to Skillsfirst.
Teacher	A person who prepares any Learner, or any person likely to become a Learner, for assessment for a qualification and who does so – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) as a lecturer, supervisor, tutor or other appropriate provider of education or training, or (b) in circumstances in which that preparation takes place primarily at home.
Assessment	Any Functional Skills exam or Speaking, Listening and Communication (SLC) assessment.
Component	This refers to the assessments which make up an overall Functional Skills qualification. English is made up of three components; Reading, Writing and SLC Mathematics and ICT contain a single component.
Formative assessment	Assessment undertaken to check learning has taken place and assess progress towards the Functional Skills level. This can be centre-devised or a commercially-available product. This does not include initial and diagnostic assessment.