

Section 1: Introduction

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1.1 Introduction to Key Skills

This guidance sets out the background and structure of the Key Skills Qualifications. It outlines details of the assessment and moderation processes which are necessary to ensure that national standards are maintained.

The term 'key skills' has come to be used to cover a range of essential skills which underpin effective learning and performance across a wide variety of contexts. They are about the application and transfer of specific knowledge and skills and are relevant to all levels of education, training, paid and unpaid work.

Key skills are seen as crucial in enabling individuals to make the most of learning and employment opportunities, as well as being relevant to life in general:-

"Key Skills are not about putting right a basic skills deficit. They are about putting basic skills to work in new contexts to support the changes and transitions that are part of everyone's experience. People with a solid grounding in the Key Skills - and the ability to update them throughout life - will have a head start in the workplace and beyond."
(Qualifying for Success, October 1997, DFEE Consultation Paper)

The key skills standards in use from September 2004 were produced by QCA, DCELLS (now Qualifications Wales) and CCEA. They provide an explicit and systematic framework for the development and assessment of key skills. They are broadly based on the competence model developed for NVQs.

Key skills are open to all **in Northern Ireland only**, regardless of age, background or qualifications, and there are no entry requirements or time limits.

1.2 Wider Key Skills Qualifications

The key skills are arranged in three skill areas and are available at three different levels. ASDAN offers levels 1 to 3 to all registered centres **in Northern Ireland only**.

Working with Others
Improving Own Learning and Performance
Problem Solving

All three wider key skills are recognised as qualifications in their own right.

The accreditation end date for the Wider KS is 31 December 2020 with the certification end date on 31 December 2022 for Level 1, 2 and 3.

Language restrictions

ASDAN's qualifications have been approved by the regulators to be offered, assessed and moderated in English only. Centres must therefore present candidates' work for external moderation in English. ASDAN will not accept work that has been translated from another language (except as contained in our published Access Arrangements).

1.3 Key Skills Levels 1 to 3

The three levels allow a student to demonstrate an increasing level of competence.

Level 1: helps candidates to develop the basic skills that are important for key skills competence and recognises their ability to apply these skills in meeting given purposes within routine situations.

Level 2: builds on level 1 by requiring candidates to extend their basic skills. It recognises their ability to take responsibility for some decisions about how they select and apply these skills to meet the demands of largely straightforward tasks.

Level 3: marks a shift from straightforward tasks to being capable of responding to the demands of more complex activities. Candidates need to demonstrate more explicit reasoning ability and personal responsibility in making decisions about how tasks are organised.

1.4 The Structure of the Key Skills Standards

Each key skill is made up of four parts:

- A short overview of the key skills at that level
- What the candidate needs to know how to do (Part A)
- What the candidate must show they can do (Part B)
- Examples and Guidance

Part A clearly indicates what the candidate needs to know and understand in order to feel confident about applying the skills within their chosen contexts (education, training, employment, voluntary work etc).

Part B describes what the candidate must do in order to meet the standards at the required level. Candidates' portfolios must contain clear evidence that they can do all of the tasks listed in Part B to the standard specified by the assessment criteria described in the components. The criteria must be used as a set for each component of the standard.

The Examples and Guidance provides examples of activities that might be used in order to demonstrate skills and suggests types of evidence that might be generated from those activities.

The development of key skills and the generation of evidence can be undertaken in a wide range of curricular and extra curricular contexts. Key skills are about application, and so the emphasis in Part A of the revised standards is on what candidates need to 'know how to do' in order to apply their skills appropriately. In meeting the requirements of Part B, candidates will provide evidence of that application. Therefore, in order to successfully attain accreditation in key skills, candidates need planned opportunities to:

- identify their learning needs
- acquire the 'know-how' as described in Part A of the standards (e.g. how to write grammatically correct text, carry out particular types of calculations and use editing facilities in a word processing package)
- develop and practise the application of skills (thinking skills) and generate evidence as described in Part B of the standards
- receive feedback on their performance and guidance on what to do in order to improve

Time and resources committed to initial assessment and learning support will go a long way towards ensuring successful candidate achievement.

1.5 Competence-Based Assessment

For key skills accreditation, the candidate's performance has to be judged against a set of prescribed standards that define the level of competence and the contexts in which that competence has to be demonstrated.

Significant features which reflect the nature of a competence-based approach to assessment are:

- Assessment is based on outcomes; i.e. the candidate's competence as measured against the assessment criteria. As it does not matter how this outcome is reached, training and development opportunities can be responsive to individual needs and there are no restrictions on styles of delivery. Development can occur in the environment most appropriate and useful to the candidate.
- No particular qualifications or experience are required for access to assessment. Different candidates are able to start at points appropriate to them.
- Candidates actively participate in the assessment process by gathering evidence of their own competence.
- The structure of the standards allows achievement to be recognised on the basis of individual qualifications. A candidate can gain accreditation for a single qualification, a group of qualifications at the same level, or qualifications at different levels.

1.6 Guidance and Support

Key skills planning

Before introducing the key skills to candidates, it is necessary to identify opportunities for individuals to participate in initial assessment and development activities and opportunities to provide evidence that will demonstrate the required skills. The development of an overall plan for the delivery of the key skills helps to ensure that sufficient opportunities exist for all the requirements to be met and that there is no unnecessary duplication of effort.

Staff development

Staff development is an essential component of a key skills plan, as tutors and assessors will need time to reach a common understanding of the units. Standards with guidance documents are available for all levels on the ASDAN website:

www.asdan.org.uk/wider-key-skills

After initial familiarisation on an individual basis, it is recommended that tutors and assessors get together in order to discuss the content of the key skills and clarify anything that is unclear. Once the key skills have been in use a little while, it is good practice for assessors to meet again to look at examples of evidence and to discuss and compare interpretation of standards; such discussion should form part of ongoing practice. Further staff development activities on a regular basis will be dependent on individual centres' needs.

Candidate induction

Candidates will need to become familiar with the key skills. Effective induction into their purpose and the content of the standards is vital to successful achievement. One strategy adopted by practitioners has been to introduce the relevant key skill following an activity in which they were used. Examples of how evidence can meet the standards can then be discussed, drawing on individual or group experience. The relevance of particular skills to a variety of contexts, and/or individuals' future plans, can also be highlighted – often a key factor in motivating individuals.

Sources of information and support

ASDAN's Regional Support Co-ordinators will be able to provide information and advice on the effective implementation of the planned programme. On-going support can be accessed through e-mail and telephone contact, and through negotiated staff training. Fees may apply in the latter case.

ASDAN also offers **Themed Support meetings** to promote a common understanding of Awarding Organisation expectations across centres and to share good practice.

The Wider Key Skills Standards with Guidance include examples of activities that might be used when developing and applying the Wider Key Skills, and of evidence that might go into a portfolio. Further guidance can be found in the following publication available via the ASDAN website: www.asdan.org.uk/wider-key-skills

The key skills qualifications standards and guidance: working with others, improving own learning and performance and problem solving Levels 1-4 (Ref: QCA/04/1294)

This document explains and further defines the requirements of Part A and Part B of the standards. They should therefore be made available to staff responsible for Wider Key Skills learning and development as well as to assessors and internal moderators.

Other useful websites providing information on key skills include:

www.asdan.org.uk

www.ofqual.gov.uk

www.ccea.org.uk

www.education.gov.uk

The mandatory recording documents, Standards and candidate logbook, containing guidance for candidates on completing the portfolio of evidence, candidate records, assessment checklists and candidate appeals procedure, are available to download from the ASDAN website www.asdan.org.uk/wider-key-skills