

Understanding adult qualifications in Literacy, Numeracy and ICT

1. Introduction

"I am shortlisting a candidate with GCSE in English and another with Level 2 in Literacy; does it mean they have the same skill at the same level? Also what is Key Skills in Communication? I am confused!"

"My Skills Broker has suggested my employees take Entry 3 numeracy qualification, what is this? What does it involve?"

There are many different qualifications available in the lifelong learning sector and it is not always easy to see how they relate to each other. Understanding levels, for example, can be complicated.

2. Understanding Levels

Most people know about GCSEs (General Certificate of Secondary Education) and have heard that a GCSE at grade A*-C is considered to be "good" and is roughly the same as NVQ Level 2 - the benchmark standard for a person to be academically or vocationally competent in a subject area. A GCSE achieved at grade D-G is roughly equivalent to NVQ Level 1. Level 3 is about the same as AS, A level or NVQ level 3.

There are 9 main levels within the lifelong learning qualifications route. The table below provides an example of how the skills progress through the levels in an ICT context.

Level	Skill
Entry level (foundation)	Turning on a PC, using a mouse and keyboard, opening the internet and performing a basic search.
Level 1 (D-G grade GCSE)	Producing a word document, saving to a file and sending an e-mail.
Level 2 (A*-C grade GCSE)	Writing formulas in a spreadsheet, using a database and performing a mail merge.
Level 3 (A Level)	Website design, computer maintenance, basic programming.
Level 4-6 (Degree)	Programming applications, designing network systems and server maintenance.
Level 7 (Masters)	Advanced skills in a computer science discipline.
Level 8/9 (Doctorate)	Specialise in a dedicated area research and application.

In literacy and numeracy, Entry level is further divided into three sub-levels: Entry Level 1, Entry Level 2 and Entry Level 3. The chart below indicates the range of skills a person can perform at each level from Entry 3 through to Level 2:

Literacy	Numeracy
At Level 2 someone can . . .	
Contribute to meetings effectively Read and understand a technical manual Write a supportive statement for a job application	Calculate area and volume accurately Select and compare different prices and measurements Weigh and measure to required tolerances
At Level 1 someone can . . .	
Write straightforward emails Complete an accident report form Read and understand short reports	Understand a payslip Understand graphs and charts Manage time effectively
Entry 3	
Write a message for a colleague Read and follow simple instructions Greet colleagues and customers effectively	Write down simple number sequences accurately Use a calculator to check totals Complete a stock control sheet

3. Literacy, numeracy and ICT qualifications for adults

The two main qualifications are:

1. Certificate in Adult Literacy/ Numeracy (ALN)
2. Key Skills

a) Certificate in Adult Literacy/Numeracy (ALN)

All adult literacy and numeracy qualifications are based on the national standards and can be awarded at all levels from Entry 1 to Level 2.

● Entry 1- Entry 3

At each level learners are assessed on 3 sub-skills:

Literacy:

- Speaking and Listening
- Reading
- Writing

Numeracy:

- Whole Number
- Measure, Shape and Space
- Handling Data

Learners can be assessed on these sub-skills at a mixture of levels to reflect their 'spikey profile', for example they may undertake Entry 1 in Speaking and Listening, but Entry 2 in Reading or Writing. Unit certification can be awarded but the full certificate can only be awarded when all three papers at one level have been achieved. If the learner does not pass, the same paper can be taken after a seven day period but evidence has to be provided that additional learning has taken place during the time between each sitting of the exam paper.

● Level 1- Level 2

The National Test at Level 1 and Level 2 consists of multiple-choice assessments that can be taken paper-based (monthly) or on demand on-line.

The paper based test is external marked by the exam board. Results are sent to the test host approximately 4-6 weeks after the test is set. On-line tests are marked instantly and the host receives the result within the hour. If a learner does not pass, they can book to re-sit. Re-sit time varies depending on whether the assessment is on-line or paper based. The learner will not sit the same paper twice.

b) Key Skills Qualifications

The Key Skills qualifications provide progression opportunities for adults who have achieved Entry Level qualifications or national tests and can be taken as stand-alone qualifications. Key Skills are designed to enhance the skills of a learner in every day tasks used in life or in the workplace. There are three main Key Skills available to adults:

- 1 Communications (COMMS)
- 2 Application of Number (AON)
- 3 Information Communication Technology (ICT)

They are available as qualifications at levels 1-4 and are assessed in two parts:

Part A assesses the same knowledge and understanding as the Adult Literacy and Numeracy tests and in fact the National Test forms the externally accredited component. **Part B** requires the completion of a portfolio demonstrating the skills to applied context, which is often linked to the learner's main programme of study.

Learners who undertake COMMS or AON Key Skills should undertake an initial assessment to see what level they are currently working at. If a learner is assessed at Level 1 and holds a GCSE F grade which is less than 36 months old in the subject area they can gain a proxy exemption to Part A of Key Skills. To gain the Key Skill they would only need to undertake Part B, the portfolio element of the qualification. If the learner and tutor feel the learner can progress to Level 2 then they would take both parts of the qualification. If the learner holds an A*-C grade GCSE they will still have to undertake Part B if they are under entitlement or Apprenticeship funding.

ICT is slightly different. If a learner achieved a GCSE grade D-G in ICT less than 36 months ago they are required to move on to Level 2. If they achieved grade A*-C they are exempt and do not have to undertake the qualification. However, if a GCSE is more than 36 months old the proxy cannot be claimed.

	Level 1		Level 2	
Taken less than 36 months ago	Proxy Part A Exam	Proxy Part B Portfolio	Proxy Part A Exam	Proxy Part B Portfolio
English GCSE D-G	√	X	X	X
Maths GCSE D-G	√	X	X	X
ICT GCSE D-G	√	√	X	X
English GCSE A*-C	√	√	√	X
Maths GCSE A*-C	√	√	√	X
ICT GCSE A*-C	√	√	√	√

√ = exemption proxy X = candidate would need to undertake the element

Key Skills have points allocated to them on UCAS Tariff. It is not compulsory for a university to accept Key Skill points, but most do.

- Level 2 = 10 points
- Level 3 = 20 points
- Level 4 = 30 points

Some universities will accept COMMS and AON Key Skills at Level 2 instead of GCSE A*-C in English and Math. Always check with the university.

4. Key Contacts at NIACE

LLN & Workplace Team
 21 De Montfort Street
 Leicester, LE1 7GE
 Tel : 0116 2044200
 Fax : 0116 2042823
 Website : www.niace.org.uk

5. Useful Websites for further information

www.dcsf.gov.uk/readwriteplus Department for Innovations, Universities and Skills support website for ALN learners and teachers.

www.keyskillssupport.net/ A support programme for teachers and trainers who teach Key Skills, on line until 2010

www.lsc.gov.uk Funding body for post 16 education

www.qca.gov.uk Qualification and Curriculum Authority can provide the latest information on all qualification in the Life Long Sector

6. Exam Boards

AQA	tel: (0161) 953 7588/7569 www.aqa.org.uk
City & Guilds	tel: (020) 7294 2800 www.cityandguilds.com
Edexcel	tel: 0870 240 9800 www.edexcel.org.uk
EDI	tel: 0870 720 2909 www.goalonline.co.uk
NCFE	tel: (0191) 239 8000 www.ncfe.org.uk
NOCN	tel: (0114) 227 0500 www.nocn.org.uk
OCNW	tel: (01524) 845 046 www.ocnw.com
OCR	tel: (024) 7685 1509. www.ocr.org.uk

This series of briefing sheets aims to provide an introduction to a variety of lifelong learning issues. Other titles are available.

Requests for briefing sheets in other formats, such as large print or brail are welcomed; we will be pleased to consider your request. Copies of this and other sheets are available from NIACE:

21 De Montfort Street

Leicester, LE1 7GE

Tel: 0116 204 4289

Email: information@niace.org.uk

They are also available on the website at:

<http://www.niace.org.uk/services/information-services/briefing-sheets>

NIACE, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, has a broad remit to promote life-long learning opportunities for adults. NIACE works to develop increased participation in education and training. It aims to do this for those who do not have easy access because of barriers of class, gender, age, race, language and culture, learning difficulties, or insufficient resources. Registered charity number 1002775; Company registration number 2603322.