

Part A affirmation/questioning for wider key skills qualifications

Guidance for centres



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Introduction

Purpose of this document

This document is intended to help key skills co-ordinators, internal verifiers and assessors in planning and carrying out the Part A affirmation and questioning process for the wider key skills qualifications pilot. The pilot applies to **all** candidates working towards any of the wider key skills (Working With Others, Improving Own Learning and Performance and Problem Solving) under the 2004 key skills standards (see City & Guilds' key skills centre guide for details).

This guidance was developed during 2004-05, and formed part of the evaluation for piloting the wider key skills as full qualifications. We continue to welcome any feedback from key skills practitioners and candidates, either via your external verifier or by emailing us at keyskills@cityandguilds.com.

Why have the questions been introduced?

One of the main recommendations from the 2003 Review of key skills was that the wider key skills should have qualification status. Candidates completing under the 2004 standards receive a full qualification certificate (rather than a unit award) for each wider key skill they complete. Moreover, qualification status will affect the availability of output-related funding for wider key skills programmes.

The Part A questions are designed to enhance quality assurance of the wider key skills by embedding good practice and introducing a degree of 'externality' to the assessment. The affirmation process should not be seen as a surrogate test, although it performs a broadly similar function in corroborating candidates' knowledge and understanding.

Most of the major key skills awarding bodies, including City & Guilds, are using a common set of Part A questions developed with QCA, ACCAC and CCEA, the qualification regulatory authorities for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

What does the questioning process involve?

The questions are designed to be used flexibly, and need only be used to check candidates' understanding of any aspects of Part A that have not been explicitly demonstrated through their portfolios. The amount of questioning needed therefore needs to be determined on an individual basis for each candidate, and this cannot therefore be carried out as a group activity.

It is possible that some candidates may have very obviously covered the whole of Part A, in their portfolio, in which case specific questioning would not be needed. However, unless the **whole** of Part A is clearly evident, at least some questioning will need to take place.

The questioning process is entirely summative, and must not be attempted before the portfolio has been completed. The questions encourage candidates to reflect on their

experience of working with others, improving performance or tackling a problem, so there is little point in trying to work through them before these activities have been completed.

Drawing on candidates' real experiences assists with authenticity and avoids the risk of 'text book' answers simply being parroted. The emphasis is on asking candidates to reflect on what they have done and what they might do differently were they to repeat the activity. In essence, it is a way of affirming that they have understood what they have done as well as done it, and it is therefore perfectly legitimate for the assessor to invite candidates to expand/develop their answers with follow-up prompts such as 'What if...' or 'How would you...'.

The questions are internally assessed and are subject to internal and external verification. Candidates' responses to any questioning, together with the assessor's record of how the portfolio was checked for Part A coverage and the appropriate questions were determined, must therefore be in an auditable format. The questions may either be answered in writing or orally (so long as there is a clear record of the candidate's responses – eg by taping the interview).

Further examples and guidance on the key skills standards can be found in 'The Wider Key Skills Standards and Guidance' (QCA publication QCA/04/1294). All assessors within the centre **must** have a copy of this document.

How are the questions organised?

Level 1

The questions are organised into three sections, mirroring the three component sections within Part A of the standard. Although assessors need to determine which question(s) are appropriate for each candidate, it is generally expected that candidates will respond to at least one question from each section.

Level 2

There is one question per component section. Again, how these are used will vary, although in most cases candidates will need to respond to all three questions.

Level 3-4

There is just one reflective question for level 3 and level 4. In nearly all cases this will need to be attempted, although assessors should guide candidates towards any aspects of Part A needing particular focus. This could take the form of supplementary questioning.

Guidance on suitable responses

The following pages provide some tentative guidance on the sort of responses anticipated for each question. This guidance should only be treated as indicative, as the definitive point of reference should be the key skills standards and guidance document.

The questions can be found as 'candidate paper' documents on our **key-skills.org** site, although they are also reproduced here for clarity.

Working With Others level 1

Section 1

Question 1

How could you check what you have to achieve?

Candidate has suggested viable ways of checking what has to be achieved, ie the objectives, either theoretically or by giving examples from own experience eg ask supervisor, superior, tutor, or by looking at a work schedule/log/duty rota.

Key words or phrases: objectives, (shared purposes for working together).

Question 2

How does working in a group/team differ from working with one other person?

Candidate has identified the need for greater communication and collaboration, more careful allocation of responsibilities, more awareness of different personalities involved, potential for achieving more. They need to be aware of where they are accountable, and their responsibilities in relation to others, eg not putting colleagues at risk, and ensuring behaviour does not offend.

Key words/phrases: objectives can only be met by three people or more working together.

Question 3

Explain how you can identify and carry through tasks and set deadlines when working with others.

Candidates should know how to identify tasks and be clear about deadlines, they should be clear about who is doing what and why, by checking with supervisor or tutor.

Key words/phrases: step one do this, step two do that etc, I needed to do step one by...because...

Question 4

Explain how you can identify and access help, materials, equipment and tools when working with others.

Candidates should know how to identify and access help and resources, and may give some examples of what they did in situations where they worked collaboratively. Where help is concerned candidates should know about other people they may ask in relation to specific aspects of their work eg first aider, health and safety officer, trades union representative.

Key words/phrases: I asked...(people) I used...(resources).

Question 5

Explain how you can identify and carry out your individual responsibilities when working with others, eg tasks, health and safety, respect for others.

Candidates are expected to be clear about aspects of the work over which they have some control, tasks they will need to do, resources they can use, where permission may be needed. They need to explain how they clarified their own objectives and with whom.

Key words/phrases: I was able to do...using the following resources...I asked...if it was all right to do it this way.

Section 2

Question 6

How can you check progress?

Candidates should know the necessary techniques and approaches to carry out tasks, and therefore should be able to describe how they checked progress in a particular situation. Awareness of own responsibilities should be remembered and deadlines agreed.

Key words/phrases: I knew I had to do...by...so that other(s) in the situation could do...

Question 7

Who can you ask for help?

Candidates should know where they are expected to sort things out for themselves and when it is essential to refer to others for help, and the people involved in offering that help.

Key words/phrases: I asked other group members...my tutor...I knew I was/was not allowed to do...

Questions 8-9

How can you support others?

How can you overcome disagreements?

Offering support to others may include asking them if they need help with aspects of a given task, or someone to speak up for them in a disagreement, or talk through a problem. Candidates should be able describe when and how they offered support for others and be aware of the difference it made. Importance of offering support should be noted as helping to achieve objectives.

Candidates should be able to suggest ways of overcoming disagreements eg negotiation, discussion, asking for advice, and may give examples if appropriate.

Section 3

Question 10

How do you know when you are working well with other people?

Candidates should be able to recognise when things have worked and where there have been problems, benchmarks for success might be: meeting original aims/objectives, meeting deadlines, building better relationships, pleasing colleagues. Problems might arise because of lack of resources, lack of time/skills, disagreements, and candidates should be able to explain strategies for dealing with these as part of collaborative working.

Key words/phrases: I know we worked well together because..... we didn't work together as well as we might have done because...

Question 11

Why is it important to offer support to others?

Candidates should understand how their own contribution helped others with the shared objectives, but should also be able to explain ways in which they helped other members of the team and why this was important.

Key words/phrases: I helped...with...otherwise we wouldn't have got it finished, achieved what we set out to do, got it finished on time, so that they can do it next time.

Question 12

How would you improve your work with others?

Candidates should have an understanding of what it means to work effectively with others, and therefore within the review process they are expected to make some suggestions as to how they might improve their work with others. Candidates need to be steered away from tasks and to concentrate on the collaborative process.

Key word/phrases: I would work better with another person/group if I did...I need to try and do...in future when I work with other people.

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Working With Others level 2

Section 1

What have you learnt about planning work with others?

Candidates should have covered the following points:

- how groups/teams operate effectively, eg the nature and interrelationship of different roles: the importance of motivation
- understanding of the meaning of objectives (the shared purposes of working together)
- planning to meet objectives by sharing information and suggestions
- accountability of own contribution towards meeting objectives and the need for discussion to clarify each person's contribution
- confirmation of working arrangements (for self and others), timescales, procedures and appropriate people for consultation.

Section 2

What have you learnt about working cooperatively towards achieving objectives you have identified?

Candidates should have covered the following points:

- meeting own responsibilities, for resources needed, completion of tasks and carrying out tasks safely
- how they supported co-operative ways of working and how individual behaviour can have a positive or negative impact on the achievement of objectives
- considering the rights and feelings of others.

Section 3

What have you learnt about reviewing your contributions and agreeing ways of improving your work with others?

Candidates should have covered the following points:

- assessing quality of own work
- providing a balanced account of what went well and less well
- identifying own specific contribution towards achievement of objectives
- making and listening to suggestions from others on improving own learning, especially improvements in terms of interpersonal impact of work.

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Working With Others level 3-4

The question

With regard to planning, doing and reviewing, what have you learnt about working with others?

Candidates would be expected to cover the following points:

- understanding the need for different roles and the importance of interpersonal skills within a group or team
- understanding the meaning of objectives (the shared purpose of working together)
- understanding the importance of being an active listener, confident in suggesting own ideas so as to come to agreement as to what is realistic in terms of time, resources and expertise
- understanding how different roles contribute to the success of working with others, and the need to discuss each person's contribution
- agreeing suitable working arrangements with others
- own responsibility for obtaining and making best use of resources
- organising and pacing work to meet deadlines and producing quality of work required
- knowing where to get support and from whom, as well as relevant health and safety procedures
- knowing how to support co-operative ways of working, understanding how individual behaviour can have an impact on the ability to achieve shared objectives
- understanding methods for resolving conflict
- understanding the importance of considering rights and feelings of others
- responsibility for informing others about progress of own work
- assessing quality of own work and judging extent to which objectives have been met
- providing balanced account of own contributions, including factors that have influenced the outcome
- showing knowledge of constructive feedback (eg be descriptive, factual and explicit)
- considering improvements in terms of interpersonal aspects of working with others (ie how effectively the group worked, **not** whether task was fulfilled or not).

For level 4, the following would need to be covered in addition:

- exploring activities to identify where and how to work with others
- researching planning methods and skills needed for working with others
- group negotiation
- taking a leading role in maintaining group momentum
- familiarity with motivational methodologies
- familiarity with a variety of presentational methods.

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Improving Own Learning and Performance level 1

Section 1

Question 1

What were your targets?

Candidates should understand the meaning of 'targets' ie 'the steps for helping to achieve personal, learning and/or career goals' and implications for how these work. With the help of tutors previously, for the Part B evidence collection, targets should be SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound), and candidates will need to refer back to their evidence collection to apply this question to their own experience.

Key words/phrases: to improve my performance my targets were...because...

Question 2

Why do you need action points to meet your targets?

Candidates should be familiar with the individual learning plan (ILP) process where they work back from what they wish to achieve, with action points to enable them to achieve it. They should know how to write action points for each target that are manageable, ie action points are the small steps or tasks that allow the targets to be met.

Key words/phrases: to meet my targets I had... action points, this meant I was able to do...towards meeting my targets.

Question 3

Why is it important to have deadlines?

Candidates should know how to set deadlines that are realistic for them, and recognise the importance in setting deadlines for the achievement of each individual action point, in order to meet the targets within the timeframe involved.

Question 4

What information should you include in a learning plan?

Information that should be included in a learning plan: the targets themselves, the action points for the achieving of those targets, the deadlines for achieving the action points and ultimately the targets, and dates when the plans will be reviewed.

Question 5

Why do you think you need to review targets?

Candidates should understand that the review process: helps them to identify knowledge and skills learned, to keep on track and check progress, and to identify any problems.

Key words/phrases: I realised I'd learned... I was better at... it helped me sort problems with...

Questions 6-7

Who could help you in achieving your targets?
How do you know when to ask for support?

Candidates should know how and when to obtain help, eg from their tutor, trainer or line manager (plus any materials that might be of use) when there are sticking points in meeting targets. Candidates should also know who will be reviewing their progress, where this will take place and when.

Key words/phrases: I asked...to help me with...because...

Section 2

Question 8

What ways can you use to help you learn, eg reading, listening, doing?

Candidates need to know methods that suit different learning styles (visual, verbal, aural, physical). They should know their own preferred style(s) and what this means in practice.

Key words/phrases: I learned...by doing..., it helped more when I did..., when I discussed..., listened to...

Questions 9-10-11

Why might you need to change the way that you work?
What change or changes can you make to the way that you work?
What do you know about the way you learn?

Candidates should be encouraged to try out different ways of learning in order to find out the ways that suit them best, and recognise that this is an important part of improving their learning and performance. Suggested alternatives need to be the candidate's own.

Key words/phrases: I normally learn best by...but I learned...by...which was different for me.

Section 3

Question 12

How do you know you if you have met your targets?

Candidates need to check against their action plan that they have done what they set out to do, and should identify one or two achievements to support this.

Key words/phrases: My target was to ... and I have done ... but I still need to do...

Question 13

What can you do if you need to continue to improve, eg quality of work, the way you work?

Candidates need to be receptive to feedback, be able to ask questions to clarify what they need to do, to set new targets and/or adopt new learning styles as necessary.

Key words/phrases: Next time I do...I'll do...

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Improving Own Learning and Performance level 2

Section 1

What have you learnt about helping set targets and planning how these will be met?

Candidates should have covered the following points:

- knowing they can improve their performance by careful advance planning and reviewing their learning
- understanding the Individual Learning Plan process and the meaning of targets (the steps for helping to achieve personal learning and/or career goals)
- providing information to help set targets, including what they had done before, what they want to achieve, and what might affect their chances of success
- showing knowledge of planning and basic time management techniques, including clear action points for each target that are manageable and capable of being achieved in the time available
- knowing how to obtain help and from whom or what, eg tutor/trainer as well as materials, and the person who will be reviewing their progress.

Section 2

What have you learnt about taking responsibility for some decisions about your learning?

Candidates should have covered the following points:

- own responsibility for checking progress against action points
- knowing about different learning styles (visual, verbal, aural and physical) and choosing the most appropriate methods for a particular context
- own responsibility for identifying when support needed, and using this effectively to help meet targets.

Section 3

What have you learnt about reviewing progress and providing evidence of your achievements?

Candidates should have covered the following points:

- identifying knowledge and skills learned from various activities
- how learning from one task has contributed to tackling another
- identifying which ways of learning best suited to person and nature of target.

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Improving Own Learning and Performance level 3-4

The question

With regard to planning, doing and reviewing, what have you learnt about improving own learning and performance?

Candidates would be expected to cover the following points:

- awareness of proper planning and time management and understanding how review, constructive feedback and reflection can help to improve learning and performance
- knowing where to obtain relevant information to think through plans and an ability to use a range of sources
- awareness of factors that might affect plans, eg time constraints, financial, legal
- clearly defined priorities in order to manage time and meet deadlines
- choosing methods to suit own preferred learning styles
- reflecting on progress, anticipating difficulties (where applicable) and identifying alternatives
- providing information on the quality of learning and performance, considering factors that might have affected outcome
- providing information on ways learning has been used to meet new demands
- identifying targets met
- demonstrating consultation with appropriate people in order to agree how improve performance further.

For level 4, the following would need to be covered in addition:

- researching and exploring opportunities for improving learning and performance
- taking responsibility for and using different ways of learning
- seeking out and receiving relevant feedback from others
- critically reflecting on learning experience (eg using log)
- presenting what has been learned.

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Problem Solving level 1

Section 1

Question 1

How do you explain what a problem is?

Candidates should know what is meant by a 'problem' – ie where there is a need to bridge a gap between a current situation and a desired situation (NB: a problem does **not** necessarily mean something is wrong).

Key words/phrases: I need to do...to do what I want to achieve.

Question 2

How can you find out more about any problem and how to solve it?

Candidates should know of whom and how to ask questions, eg about what happened, what known or not known about a problem, how others are affected.

Key words/phrases: What can I do about..., Can I discuss...with you, I need to talk to...about this.

Question 3

How can you check that a problem has been solved?

Candidates should be able to discuss the sort of results that can be expected and the methods for carrying out checks.

Key words/phrases: I discussed with...the checks I would make when I had finished.

Question 4

What different ways might you use to tackle a problem?

Candidates should be able to come up with more than one way of tackling the problem, eg how to look at different parts of the problem; think things through from the starting conditions, or starting at the end and working backwards; ask others about similar problems.

Key words/phrases: I asked...how s/he did it as s/he was doing a similar thing, I drew a diagram to show the different parts of the problem, I thought about what I wanted to achieve and wrote a list of all the things I needed to do first.

Section 2

Question 5

Who might help you to tackle a problem?

Candidates need to be able to identify who to approach - eg tutor or supervisor, and identify the limitations of what they can do (eg in terms of health and safety).

Key words/phrases: I spoke to...about...because I thought there might be a problem with...

Questions 6-7

How would you set about planning what needs to be done?

What things must you consider when making a plan?

Candidates need to indicate an action plan, including a list of methods and steps for working through the problem. The plan should include timescales, necessary resources and who to ask when unsure about how to proceed.

Key words/phrases: I make an action plan listing methods and timescales. I asked...if this was ok.

Question 8

How do you check you are following a plan?

Candidate should use their plan to monitor their progress, eg by ticking off action points as they are completed, amending the plan if required.

Key words/phrases: I kept going back to my plan to make sure I was doing it right, I needed to change...because...meant it wouldn't work.

Section 3

Question 9

How can you decide how well a plan has worked?

Candidates should understand step-by-step methods for carrying out checks. In testing a product or process, candidates should consider whether it actually works as intended, has no unwanted side effects and is acceptable to others involved.

Key words/phrases: I discussed and measured... with..., when...happened I was able to put it right by...

Question 10

Without thinking about a particular problem, how might you improve your skills in solving problems?

Candidates should check how to improve their skills for each stage of the problem solving process.

Key words/phrases: I did a review with my assessor/tutor and agreed that next time I would follow my plan more carefully.

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Problem Solving level 2

Section 1

What have you learnt about identifying a problem and identifying different ways of tackling a problem?

Candidates should have covered the following points:

- knowledge and understanding of what a problem is (ie the need to bridge a gap between a current situation and a desired situation)
- identifying a problem's main features and how those might impact on self and others
- knowing how to check if/how the problem has been solved
- different methods for tackling problems (eg written, visual , numerical and physical).

Section 2

What have you learnt about planning and trying out ways of solving problems?

Candidates should have covered the following points:

- understanding that it might not always be possible to implement chosen way of solving problem and that other options might need to be explored
- awareness of following risk factors that might affect results: health and safety, time constraints, lack of expertise
- different planning methods: estimating resources needed, anticipating how to get round possible difficulties
- describing own specialist knowledge required
- understanding full implications of making changes to plan
- obtaining and using support from tutor, supervisor or other appropriate person.

Section 3

What have you learnt about checking if a problem has been solved and identifying ways to improving problem solving?

Candidates should have covered the following points:

- knowing and applying a variety of checking methods (eg test, observe, measure, sample, inspect, ask others) and using these accurately and appropriately
- describing results with clarity
- identifying strengths and weaknesses or approach
- review and reflect on the outcomes in order to identify ways of improving problem solving skills.

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Problem Solving level 3-4

The question

With regard to planning, doing and reviewing, what have you learnt about problem solving?

Candidates would be expected to cover the following points:

- knowing what is meant by a problem (a need to bridge a gap between a current situation and a desired situation)
- different methods for exploring a problem and its features, eg dividing into manageable sub-problems, investigating effects on other people, visualising from different perspectives, drawing on similar problems and making comparisons
- different methods for tackling the problem, eg written, visual, numerical and physical
- how to identify the pay-off and risk associated with each approach, and identifying choice based on best available evidence
- different planning methods, eg timelines, milestones, review points
- judging when support and feedback will be useful and using this effectively
- understanding importance of regularly checking progress against plan
- understand tests of effectiveness of a product or process
- describing results in detail, using outcomes to draw conclusions as to extent problem has been solved
- reviewing adequacy of approach at each stage of the process, with hindsight identify alternative approaches and predict relative effectiveness of these.

For level 4, the following would need to be covered in addition:

- exploring work activities to identify opportunities for problem solving
- carrying out cost/benefit analyses and studying relationship between value and risks
- managing the process
- presenting outcomes.

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