

**For the attention of the
Essential Skills co-ordinator
– centres in **Wales****

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Qualifications **Essential Skills Wales**
Essential Skills for Work and Life

Level **all**
Number **3768, 3846**

This news sheet contains the following information:

- Essential Skills Wales – understanding the required standard
(*****IMPORTANT UPDATE***** – please read and action)
- Likely changes to ESW from 2015
- Essential Skills for Work and Life – now available, with levels 2-3 to follow
- Certification codes – a reminder
- ESOL Skills for Life – future plans

This edition follows the previous Essential Skills update in **January 2013**.

**Essential Skills Wales
– understanding the required standard**

*****IMPORTANT UPDATE*****

You may be aware that the Qualification Regulation team within the Welsh Government recently carried out a [Comparability Study](#) focusing on the Writing component of ESW Communication across all awarding organisation. This update sets out some of the findings from the study, along with its implications for City & Guilds' ESW centres.

It is important to emphasise from the outset that ESW was judged to be 'succeeding in its main purpose'. Nevertheless, the study highlighted a number of concerns about

- candidate independence
- incompleteness and/or organisation of evidence
- consistency of assessment decisions, within and between centres.

The study considered samples of Communication portfolios completed during 2011-12 from all ESW awarding organisations, including City & Guilds. Regrettably, the reviewers identified a number of instances where **candidates had been certificated without their portfolios meeting all of the evidence requirements**. Their concerns especially centred on portfolios not always containing an explicit plan and at least one draft for documents (as required under the evidence requirements for C1.3, C2.3 and C3.3).

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NEWS



More generally, the Comparability Study highlighted instances (across all AOs) of

- spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG) errors – including instances where it was apparent that assessors and/or Internal Quality Assurers (or the equivalent) were not capable of assess these requirements to the standard
- poorly organised/referenced evidence
- lack of authentication, including one or two instances where work had been corrected by the assessor and then copied out by the candidate.

What action is City & Guilds taking?

Since the Comparability Study was a formal review carried out by the Regulator, we have been required to develop an Improvement Plan to address the issues and possible non-compliances identified in the portfolios that came from our centres. Clearly some of this activity would happen anyway, although the following has formed part of our formal response:

- Additional briefing day for ESW QCs, focusing on the Comparability Study and implications for our centres
- Standardisation event for centres
- A review of our External Quality Assurance (EQA) arrangements for ESW, considering in particular how Supporting Customer Excellence has affected how we monitor and support centres' ESW provision.

Notes from the centre standardisation event held on 12 April

We'd like to reiterate our thanks to the centres that attended the standardisation event on 12 April, especially their willingness to bring along samples of portfolios that could prompt frank and lively discussions about the acceptability or sufficiency of evidence.

The main purpose of the event was to affirm understanding of the qualification requirements, but crucially to help centres relate these to their own settings and learners. As well as looking at these portfolios and providing an opportunity to share experiences and relate discussions that had taken place during internal standardisation meetings, the Comparability Study was discussed more directly via the following posed questions:

- **Lack of explicit evidence of planning**
Evidence requirements say 'at least one draft' – how can this capture the process efficiently?
- **Appropriateness for purpose/audience**
Are contractions (eg don't, can't) appropriate in formal writing?
- **SPaG accuracy**
How many errors? How much guidance can assessors give?
- **Consistency/robustness of internal/external quality assurance**
Are assessors' (and IQAs) own literacy skills secure? Is the standard applied consistently by all staff across the whole centre?

- **Use of Welsh/English language**

Are candidates being disadvantaged as a result of being expected to write in their second language?

To set these questions in context, some of the observations from the ESW Steering Group's response (see below) were related – eg the importance of capturing the development processes involved in producing a document that is fit for its intended purpose. Whilst the evidence requirements state that portfolios must contain a plan and at least one draft, it was never intended that this should be done mechanistically simply to satisfy the evidence requirements or treated as a box-ticking exercise.

There was further discussion about how a 'draft' might be explicit when work is produced electronically; for example this might be by including an earlier iteration of the document or other evidence to show that the document went through a developmental process. It was pointed out that the Steering Group had highlighted the importance of learners being able to take ownership of their work and reflect on the changes they made to get documents into a final state.

Will City & Guilds be holding any more standardisation events?

The short answer is 'yes'! We are planning a further series of events this autumn and next spring, initially to discuss likely changes to ESW over the next couple of years (see next section), but also to share experiences of working with the current qualifications. Look out for details of these on our Events page (www.cityandguilds.com/events) over the coming months.

We're also launching a new online community for Maths/English teachers and tutors over the next few weeks (at the same time as launching a brand new range of teaching and learning materials) that will allow some of these issues to be discussed. Unlike the current Functional Skills tutor forums on SmartScreen, these will be open to all and not limited to users of any particular qualification.

What do our QCs think about the Comparability Study?

The ESW QC team met a few months ago to discuss the Comparability Study. Here's a flavour of what they raised:

- Advising centre staff on appropriate ways of giving feedback to candidates without leading them.
- Number and type of errors permitted for grammar, spelling and punctuation – recognising that in spirit the evidence requirements only allows for occasional slips; QCs agreed documents intended for public consumption should be error-free.
- Types and format of document – what should be sought.
- Reiterating to centres that portfolios must evidence the planning and drafting process.
- Good practice examples used by some centres to give formative and summative feedback – eg symbol cards for SPaG, as well as examples of feedback for Application of Number.
- Minimum expectations in terms of referencing and assessment decisions.

How can I access the Comparability Study? It's available from <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/qualificationsinwales/qualificationtypesinwales/essentialskillswales/comparabilitystudy/?lang=en>.

ESW Steering Group response to Comparability Study

The Welsh Government's Essential Skills Wales Steering Group contains representatives from schools, colleges, prisons, work based learning providers, adult community learning, local government and awarding organisations. It meets periodically to bridge the gap between policy and implementation of ESW, and considered the Comparability Study during its last meeting in February.

These are its main observations (NB the paragraph numbers refer to the relevant sections of the Comparability Study):

Comparability Study issue	ESW Steering Group Response/Recommendation
<p>22: <i>Use of contractions (e.g. can't) within a formal document – is it ever appropriate?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal writing is constantly in cultural flux. Writing should have some awareness of appropriateness and register for context/purpose/audience – but there are no absolutes. The context, purpose and/or audience should be clarified by the practitioner, then using professional judgement in relation to this. There should be discussion recorded around this, not necessary evidence, but useful if there is an issue by an Awarding Organisation. This would ensure competence of the assessor. Awareness of this is important, with these conversations between learner, assessors, IVs, EVs and AOs being had to ensure some standardisation.
<p>23: <i>Are two different teachers the same as two different audiences?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The study does not explicitly say two different 'types' of audiences. Estyn insists audience 'types' need to be different. Reaching for two very different people is better than two teachers. However two teachers can be different audiences as long as they make explicit how they will be approaching assessment differently. Same type of work, same purpose with same documents is not appropriate. Type, purpose and functionality are more important than audience.
<p>24, 25, 26: <i>Development evidenced through drafting – some learners are correct first time though. Do drafts really evidence progress/distance-travelled?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drafts demonstrate process more than progress or outcomes. Learners should ensure that they draft, so that process is explicit. Learners develop the habit of drafting and preparation, but it does not necessarily evidence distance-travelled. Other things can be used instead of drafts: plans, assessor questions, a review of how they got to that point (as in WKS), There should be reflection from the learner on drafts – why have they edited errors? If they have received too much or too specific guidance, a learner might not have any idea how they got there or why the redrafted work is better – the simply followed instructions.
<p>27: <i>Using pre-set formats</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners should be afforded the opportunity to select appropriate formats to use for their work. Formats can vary depending on levels. Appropriateness is more important than absolute or traditional concepts. A diversity of writing styles and techniques can be exemplified between document The learner should at some point create at least one considerable-sized, sufficiently-detailed, formal document.

Comparability Study issue	ESW Steering Group Response/Recommendation
33: <i>Using images.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Images are in the 'non-mandatory' third column of the standards... but so is Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar – so can still heavily influence assessment. • What's most important is judging when images are inappropriate, irrelevant or do not add value or functionality to the work.
44: <i>Defining complexity at L3</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Complexity' in the Mandatory Definitions is clear. • Professional judgement necessary. Ensure standardisation, training and exemplars are used. • Can be writing on an apparently complex subject that demands complex discussion, or a complex 'treatment' of an apparently simple subject. The same question should expect a different complexity of 'treatment' at different levels.

Make sure you have all the right documents!

One observation at the recent standardisation event suggested that not all assessors and IQAs are familiar with all of the current ESW qualification documents. Here's a quick reminders:

- **Essential Skills Wales (2010)**
Welsh Government document – setting out all of the evidence/knowledge requirements and mandatory definitions
- **Essential Skills Wales Support Document (November 2011)**
Additional Welsh Government document – clarifying expectations around some of the evidence and knowledge requirements
- **City & Guilds ESW logbooks**
Can be used to record assessment decisions and location of evidence (and include optional knowledge checklists). Use of these documents is not compulsory, although any alternative recording system must be fit for purpose and agreed in advance with the centre's QC.

NB the logbooks only summarise the evidence requirements – please ensure you use them in conjunction with to the ESW standards document.

All of these documents are available to download from the ESW page on our website – www.cityandguilds.com/esw.

Likely changes to ESW from 2015

As we indicated in January's update, the Welsh Government's Review of 14-19 Qualifications has resulted in a number of proposed changes to ESW, namely:

- removal of approval for pre-16 delivery
 - now confirmed this will apply from September 2014
- reviewing/simplifying the qualification standards, and developing a new assessment methodology
 - likely to involve an internally-assessed controlled task and short external test, but with more 'manageable' evidence requirements
- replacing ESW ICT with a new qualification in digital literacy
 - e-Skills asked to research and consider potential models
- clearer standards and more effective guidance on requirements for teaching ESW
 - aim to improve teacher training and tighten up practice
- issues of rigour highlighted in Comparability Study and elsewhere to be tackled
 - hence the Improvement Plan, although it is expected the new assessment model will have less potential for inconsistent interpretation.
- wider Key Skills to be reviewed
 - to focus more broadly on 'employability' skills.

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) has already begun the process of 'cleansing' the Communication and Application of Number standards at levels 1 and 2, with input from a number of awarding organisations including City & Guilds. Work on a new assessment model will then begin, with piloting likely from 2014 and full implementation from September 2015 (the formal review date for the current ESW qualifications).

There is a possibility that at least aspects of the new assessment model will be shared with the (currently entirely separate) Essential Skills qualifications in Northern Ireland, as well as (potentially) the Core Skills framework in Scotland.

We are planning a series of centre briefing events in the autumn, which will include an opportunity to discuss the likely new assessment arrangements more fully. In some respects we feel that some of the difficulties with the current ESW standards and qualifications stem from a lack on current practitioner input during their early stages of development; it's in everyone's interest to make sure that mistake is not repeated.

Essential Skills for Work and Life – now available, with levels 2-3 to follow

The new Essential Skills for Work and Life qualifications (3846) are now available at Entry 1-3 and Level 1, with Levels 2-3 under development and due for launch from this autumn.

As we've indicated in previous updates, this suite of units and qualifications can be used to put together flexible and personalised programmes to build learners' confidence and help them address specific skills gaps across communication, application of number and/or ICT.

Unlike ESW, the Essential Skills for Work and Life qualifications are on the Qualifications and Credit Framework, allowing individual units to be recognised as well as providing a choice of qualification sizes (ranging from 6 credits to 37). The units are all aligned to the ESW evidence and knowledge requirements, so can help learners gain the skills and confidence necessary for ESW.

The units were developed collaboratively by a number of awarding organisations, and are therefore transferable if learners move between centres or undertake further learning at a later date.

Certification codes – a reminder

We announced in January that we have had to introduce a series of certification modules for each of the Essential Skills Wales and wider Key Skills qualifications within 3768. These module codes (eg 3768-901, 3768-902) must now be entered **as well as** the relevant unit/assessment code before a certificate will generate.

Certification modules are widely used in many City & Guilds qualifications (eg in the Employability and Personal Development qualifications – 7546), especially where the same unit/assessment code can be counted towards more than one qualification or is used within more than one registration route. They are used to prevent multiple certificates being generated automatically. Within 3768, they are needed to prevent candidates with multiple registrations (eg for both 3768-01 and -02) or previous wider Key Skills from receiving duplicate certificates.

The Walled Garden Catalogue lists each of the certification codes that must be entered. Please be aware that these must be entered **in addition** to the relevant unit/assessment code. The January 2013 update contained further details about this process.

Please also be aware that a similar system of certification modules operates within the Essential Skills for Work and Life (3846) qualifications.

ESOL Skills for Life – future plans

Finally, we announced last month that the ESOL Skills for Life qualifications (3692) will be revised next year in response to various public policy changes in England. The likely changes are explained more fully in the May 2013 Update on the 3692 webpage, but in summary:

- All future ESOL qualifications (apart from International ones) will need to be on the Qualifications and Credit Framework, so they have an explicit credit value for funding and other purposes.
- The current ESOL Skills for Life qualification will (except for the full-mode qualifications at levels 1 and 2) be extended in their current form until 31 August 2014.
- A similar guarantee cannot currently be given for the full-mode Level 1-2 qualifications because the 'national test' that these qualifications use to assess Reading is due to be phased out. However we are working urgently with Ofqual, the UK Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the other ESOL awarding organisations to try and find an acceptable solution in time for this September.

Product update continued



Please also note we have recently updated our Entry level ESOL Skills for Life assignments – we anticipate that these have been sufficiently 'future proofed' to be easily adaptable for use in any future Framework-based ESOL qualifications. The old assignments will remain available as well for a short period.

Besides a 'like for like' Framework replacement for 3692, we are also considering the potential for a more flexible suite of qualification to support personalised learning and small-step progression – eg along similar lines to Essential Skills for Work and Life, but focusing specifically on language acquisition.