

the facilitator has to try and accommodate the learners who are not yet at the required competence level, the opportunities of success for learners who do qualify for entry to the FLC learning programme are compromised.

What is the external assessment for Foundational Learning Competence?

Each learning area has an external assessment. The final assessment in each learning area consists of 60 questions in a multiple-choice format. Each external assessment is 2,5 hours in length.

The two subject areas of *Foundational Learning Competence in Communications* and *Foundational Learning Competence in Mathematical Literacy* are assessed separately. Each subject has an external assessment conducted at IEB recognised assessment centres nationally. The IEB will be setting up a database of assessment centres at which learners may write the examination.

The purpose of these assessments is to check whether learners are proficient enough in the foundational skills and knowledge of each learning area in order to engage effectively in formal occupational training.

The assessment model that has been adopted is intended to support occupational skills development, and is therefore based on practical needs which require that the tests:

- are available regularly and in the long term, electronically, on demand;
- have a quick turn-around time for delivery of results;
- are relatively inexpensive and easy to administer.

To meet these requirements the assessments are in a multiple-choice, machine-scored format.

The key feature of such a model is the on-going building of a bank of trialled assessment items that can be used in various permutations.

The questions are based on the curricula of the Foundational Learning Competence in the relevant learning area. They are proficiency assessments, aiming to test the state of readiness to embark on learning rather than assessment of completed learning.

The items have different levels of complexity. The test specifications indicate how many questions at each level of complexity must be included in the test. The following are the ratings of achievement:

80% – 100%	Competent Outstanding (CO)
70% – 79%	Competent Commendable (CC)
50% – 69%	Competent Adequate (CA)
40% – 49%	Not Competent Threshold (NCT)
Less than 40%	Not Yet Competent (NYC)

Exemplar papers are available from the IEB website (www.ieb.co.za).



QCTO Contact details

123 Francis Baard Street Pretoria

Postnet Suite 248

Private Bag X06 Waterkloof 0145

Email: info@qcto.org.za

IEB Contact details

5 Anerley Road Parktown

Johannesburg 2193

P O Box Highlands North 2037

Tel: 011 483 9700

Fax: 01 486 2654

Email: assess@ieb.co.za

www.ieb.co.za



Introduction

On 18 May 2012, the IEB was appointed as the **Assessment Quality Partner (AQP)** of the **Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO)** for the part qualification, **Foundational Learning Competence (FLC)**.

The IEB has a long history with the assessment of adult learners, particularly in industry, where the learning environment differs substantially from a traditional institutional environment. The different learning environment however does not diminish the need for a well-articulated learning programme in these fundamental areas of learning. There is enough research that shows that language proficiency is closely aligned to success in learning in other domains. In addition, success in industry does require a minimum level of mathematical literacy competence.

The National Artisan Moderating Body (NAMB) was established, by law, as the first Assessment Quality Partner to the QCTO in July 2011. The IEB is the first non-legislated body to be appointed as an Assessment Quality Partner for the QCTO. The IEB is a non-profit organisation, dedicated to providing adults in industry with reliable and valid assessment of competence in the fundamental learning areas since its inception in 1989.

As part of its Service Level Agreement with the QCTO, the IEB will be establishing a record of providers of Foundational Learning Competence and also a database of assessment centres for the FLC. Information about these processes will be made available.

The IEB is proud and honoured to be involved in building the skills base of our country – we are Proudly South African and dedicated to doing the best we can to overcome the education deficit that our democracy has inherited. The IEB will work closely with the QCTO to ensure that learners, providers and industry are provided with information about the curriculum and the assessment processes.

This information will be made available shortly on the IEB website (www.ieb.co.za) under the heading of Foundational Learning Competence in the Adult Assessment section of the website.

What is Foundational Learning Competence (FLC)?

Foundational Learning Competence is a part qualification consisting of two learning areas: Communications and Mathematical Literacy. It describes the minimum competence needed in these two key areas that is required by people to function optimally in the world of work. The FLC describes the minimum competence required of learners to deal successfully with occupational learning at NQF Levels 2 – 4.

The school-leaving qualification, the National Senior Certificate, is registered at NQF Level 4. Hence the Foundational Learning Competence addresses the needs of learners in the occupational qualifications that are registered on the NQF at Levels 2, 3 and 4, i.e. below Grade 12.

The Foundational Learning Competence is a compulsory part of all new qualifications developed under the auspices of the



Foundational Learning Competence NEWSLETTER JUNE 2012

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IEB Contact details

5 Anerley Road Parktown

Johannesburg 2193

P O Box 875 Highlands North 2037

Tel: 011 483 9700

Fax: 011 486 2654

Email: assess@ieb.co.za

www.ieb.co.za

Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) at NQF levels 3 and 4. This does not mean that developers of qualifications at NQF Level 2 cannot include Foundational Learning as a requirement. It has replaced the 'fundamentals' in Mathematics and Communications that were required previously in all qualifications at NQF Levels 1 to 4.

It is a part qualification registered at NQF Level 2. It has a credit value of 40, 20 for Foundational Learning Competence in Communications and 20 for Foundational Learning Competence in Mathematical Literacy.

There are three documents that describe the learning required for the FLC, namely the Foundational Learning Competence Part Qualification (which contains the Exit Level Outcomes and Associated Assessment Criteria for both Communications and Mathematical Literacy), the Foundational Learning Competence Communication in English: Curriculum Framework and the Foundational Learning Competence in Mathematical Literacy: Curriculum Framework. These are registered with the QCTO, and provide detailed specifications of knowledge, content, applied skills, range statements and assessment requirements.

Providers may offer FLC learning programmes in order to prepare learners to write the FLC external assessment. Programme development must be done in relation to the curriculum frameworks and compliance with these documents is an indicator in the provider accreditation process for this part qualification. Both curriculum framework documents are available on the IEB website.

What is the rationale for requiring learners to complete Foundational Learning Competence?

The skills developed in the two learning areas, Communications and Mathematical Literacy, have been identified as foundational for learners wanting to progress in their occupation and skills development.

There is ample research that shows that language proficiency is closely aligned to success in learning in other areas. Historical educational backlogs which resulted from an unfair education dispensation have resulted in many adult learners having a gap in their understanding of and ability to apply language and mathematical literacy concepts in the workplace. While learners may be ready for training at the required level in the technical or practical aspects of a qualification, i.e. they are able to 'do', very often their language skills in English (normally the language of teaching and learning) are at a much lower level. This causes a lot of problems in relation to dealing with the theoretical concepts in the learning material and the acquisition of new skills and knowledge in the occupational training. Similarly occupational training does require an understanding of numbers and knowledge of how to work with numbers especially in key areas of measurement and quantity.

In 2007 the process for the development of the Foundational Learning Competence (FLC) was begun by the Department of Labour. The FLC has replaced the fundamental unit standards

in Mathematics and Communications that were required in all SAQA qualifications at NQF Levels 1–4. This decision was taken essentially because the fundamental unit standards were not done for a variety of reasons and had become a blockage in the system. A key reason for this was because learners were required to study mathematics or language skills that were unnecessary for their specific occupational needs. Hence there are many South Africans who have been denied qualifications in occupations and trades at NQF levels 2, 3 and 4 because they are unable to achieve the compulsory fundamental requirements at all four levels in the FET band for mathematical literacy and language.

The FLC is more focussed and directed to the minimum competence required in each area in order to function optimally in the world of work. It hence supports the objectives of the NQF that the fundamental unit standards were intended to achieve in terms of redress, access to meaningful learning, the achievement of qualifications and providing a basis for lifelong learning.

Once a learner has completed the FLC, s/he does not have to do it again even if the learner moves onto a qualification registered at a higher level, up to and including NQF Level 4.

If a specific area of study requires additional mathematical knowledge to that included in the Foundational Learning Competence in Mathematical Literacy, the qualification developers will need to include the additional mathematics requirements into the qualification itself. Similarly, qualifications that require additional competence in communications skills will need to include these into the qualification itself.

The *Foundational Learning* Competence is designed to address occupational needs and hence has no direct equivalent in the traditional schooling sector.

What is Foundational Learning Competence in Communications?

The Foundational Learning Competence in Communications describes the knowledge of language and the thinking processes required to communicate effectively in the workplace.

FLC Communications provides the basis in the language of instruction to enable a learner to deal effectively with occupational training, and communication in the workplace. The purpose of this component is to enable individuals to deal confidently and successfully with the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) of formal occupational training, in relation to oral skills, reading and writing. It is the language of most external assessments such as trade tests. People who attend a FLC learning programme are given practice in speaking, listening, reading and writing meaningfully and effectively in the language of instruction. Once they have achieved their part qualification in Communications they will be able more easily to progress further in their chosen occupational pathways and workplace contexts.

The FLC is not ABET. Communications in ABET and NQF Level 1 focus on using reading for learning rather than learning how to read. So while the function of reading programmes up to and

including NQF Level 1 focused on being able to identify the vocabulary and the language structures in context to be able to understand and comprehend what was being said, the focus in Foundational Learning Competence is to read for information. Gathering information is not only about extracting relevant information from a text but also to infer meaning, to use the information gathered to make deductions, to develop the logic of an argument, to organise thinking and to extract the key messages from an extended piece of writing.

The content of the FLC Communications learning programme covers the following:

- Writing
- Speaking and listening
- Visual literacy
- Language structure and usage
- Study skills
- Workplace terminology

The knowledge, skills and processes for FLC: Communications are set out in the curricula and describe the learning outcomes, the scope and contexts in which these can be learned or practiced, as well as activity guidelines and illustrative exemplars for different skills and tasks. The curriculum documents do not represent actual learning programmes – teachers of the FLC will need to contextualise the learning in relation to the occupational sector or trade of specific learners.

There are two documents that describe the learning required, namely the Foundational Learning Competence Communications Part Qualification (which contains the Exit Level Outcomes and Associated Assessment Criteria for both Communications and Mathematical Literacy) and the Foundational Learning Competence Communication in English: Curriculum Framework. These documents are available on the IEB website (www.ieb.co.za).

What is Foundational Learning Competence in Mathematical Literacy?

The Foundational Learning Competence in Mathematical Literacy is the minimum, generic mathematical literacy that will provide learners with an adequate foundation to cope with the mathematical demands of occupational training and to engage meaningfully in real-life situations involving mathematics.

Foundational Mathematical Literacy will also serve as the foundation for further development of an individual in mathematical literacy contexts and mathematical concepts that may be specific to an occupation or trade.

Individuals who have met all the requirements of Foundational Mathematical Literacy are able to solve problems in real contexts by responding to information about mathematical ideas that is presented in a variety of ways. Individuals will solve problems by defining the problem, analysing and making sense of the information provided, planning how to solve the problem, executing their plan, interpreting and evaluating the results, and justifying the method and solution. Using their

mathematical literacy and understanding of numbers, they will make sense of the workplace and the world in which they live.

The content of the FLC: Mathematical Literacy curriculum covers the following:

- Number and quantity
- Finance
- Data and chance
- Measurement
- Space and shape
- Patterns and relationships

In solving problems, individuals will apply skills such as identifying or locating relevant information, ordering, sorting, comparing, counting, estimating, computing, measuring, modelling, interpreting and communicating.

The knowledge, skills and processes for FLC: Mathematical Literacy are set out in the curricula and describe the learning outcomes, the scope and contexts in which these can be learned or practiced, as well as activity guidelines and illustrative exemplars for different skills and tasks. The curriculum documents do not represent actual learning programmes – teachers of the FLC will need to contextualise the learning in relation to the occupational sector or trade of specific learners.

There are two documents that describe the learning required, namely the Foundational Learning Competence Communications Part Qualification (which contains the Exit Level Outcomes and Associated Assessment Criteria for both Communications and Mathematical Literacy) and the Foundational Learning Competence Mathematical Literacy: Curriculum Framework. These documents are available on the IEB website (www.ieb.co.za).

What level of competence should be in place before a learner enters a Foundational Learning Competence learning programme?

A learner who is competent at ABET Level 3 in the learning area should be able to manage the FLC learning programme.

The *Foundational Learning Competence* assumes that learners entering a foundational learning programme have a minimum competence level in the relevant learning area at ABET Level 3 or its equivalent. This is not a formal certification requirement, as there are no certification requirements for entry to the external assessment process.

It must be emphasised that entering learners onto a programme for which they do not have the pre-requisite knowledge is demoralising for the learner and wasteful in terms of costs. It also makes the work of the facilitator much harder as s/he has to manage a wider competence range of learners than is advisable. In addition, because