

**Revised
for 2004
standards**



Good practice guide



Writing assignments



department for
education and skills



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For the full range of Key Skills Support Programme publications and online resources, please visit the website at www.keyskillssupport.net.

Introduction

This publication is one of a series of Good practice guides produced by the Key Skills Support Programme. For a complete list of titles please see facing page.

What is the purpose of the guides?

All the guides are designed to provide practical advice and guidance to teachers delivering and assessing key skills in schools and colleges. Each guide can be used as an introduction, as the basis of training sessions, as a source of ideas, for reference, as a handbook, or just for reassurance. They are based on the experience of centres that have been delivering key skills in the last few years, and particularly since September 2000.

Who are the guides for?

The guides are written primarily for staff who are relatively new to key skills, though more experienced practitioners will also find them helpful. All the guides will be useful for key skills coordinators and managers. This guide will be particularly useful to teachers who are responsible for writing assignments that integrate key skills into main subject and enrichment programmes.

What is this guide about?

This guide offers advice and guidance on planning and writing assignments that provide opportunities for students to practise key skills and/or to produce key skills portfolio evidence in the context of their main learning programme. It has been updated to take account of the revised 2004 standards.

What is not included in this guide?

- Detailed advice and guidance on interpreting the key skills standards and assessing students' work. Assessment is the responsibility of the awarding bodies, who provide specialised training (see Appendix 6 for contact details).
- Advice on how to produce, develop and manage key skills portfolios. This is provided in another guide in this series: *Developing and managing portfolios*, available from the Key Skills Support Programme.
- Advice and guidance on independent assessment. This is provided in another guide in this series: *Preparing for the external tests*, available from the Key Skills Support Programme.

In this guide, the term 'Guidance; Comm, AoN, ICT' is used to refer to *The key skills qualifications standards and guidance: communication, application of number, and information and communication technology; Levels 1–4 2004.*

The term 'Guidance; WWO, IOLP, PS' is used for *The wider key skills qualifications standards and guidance: working with others, improving own learning and performance, and problem solving; Levels 1–4 2004.*

Both are published by QCA (refs QCA/04/1272 and QCA/04/1294) and are available from QCA Publications (01787 884444) or from the QCA website www.qca.org.uk/keyskills.

What are key skills assignments?

Key skills assignments are not literally key skills assignments at all, but are subject-based assignments that integrate the development and achievement of key skills. The best key skills assignments are those whose primary purpose is to support learning and achievement in the main subject and which are naturally integrated into that main subject. Key skills assignments should not be designed with key skills as the primary objective.

Effective key skills assignments:

- encourage active learning
- provide opportunities to practise, develop and apply key skills
- provide opportunities to produce evidence for the key skills portfolio
- encourage critical thinking and reflective learning.

The integration of key skills into main subjects:

- demonstrates the relevance of key skills
- encourages good learning habits
- raises the standard of students' work
- encourages students to bring their critical and reflective skills to bear on the topic they are studying.

Key skills emphasise the process as well as the product of learning.

Key skills assignments should be:

- purposeful
- appropriate
- achievable.

Purposeful

Purposeful assignments contribute to the learning of the main subject or are directly related to the interests of a student. They meet a realistic purpose in a student's work or leisure. Evidence that is collected simply to satisfy the requirements of the key skills portfolio is not purposeful and does not meet the assessment requirement. Key skills assignments should provide direct links between key skills and the student's main subject or interest, as well as realistic and relevant opportunities for students to demonstrate their competence and understanding.

Appropriate

Appropriate assignments enable students to satisfy the portfolio evidence requirements of the key skills standards, as specified in Part B. They cover the standard (or standards) at the right level and include all the evidence requirements for one or more components of the key skill. They may include opportunities to demonstrate more than one key skill (see Appendix 1: Linking key skills at Level 2).

Some assignments focus on skills development and provide opportunities to practise key skills, rather than gather portfolio evidence. They contribute to formative assessment and enable students to apply the techniques and gain experience of becoming independent, flexible learners.

Achievable

Achievable key skills assignments take account of the time and resources available and don't make unrealistic demands on the student. Some resources may be provided for students (especially at Level 1) while students working towards Level 3 key skills will need to show greater independence in searching for and selecting the materials and information they need.

The importance of level

The key skills levels are based on a clear model of progression. As the level rises, there is greater demand for the student to demonstrate:

- increased independence and autonomy in deciding how to apply their skills
- the ability to cope with more demanding situations and contexts
- a wider range of more complex techniques.

For a detailed account of progression between key skills levels, see Guidance; Comm, AoN, ICT pages 8–9 and Guidance; WWO, IOLP, PS pages 6–7.

At Levels 1 and 2, key skills assignments can be based on straightforward subjects and materials that students often meet in their work and studies. At Level 3, key skills assignments must involve complex subjects and materials. For example, complex subjects in Communication include those that deal with abstract or sensitive issues, and lines of enquiry dependent on clear reasoning. In Application of Number, complex activities require students to consider carefully the nature and sequence of tasks.

Application of Number at Levels 2 and 3 and Information and Communication Technology at Level 3 require a student to include portfolio evidence of at least one activity that includes tasks for all three components. At least one assignment must therefore enable students to 'plan, do, reflect on and review' their work. In these three units, students need to demonstrate their skills in:

- obtaining and interpreting information
- carrying out calculations and developing information
- interpreting their results and presenting their findings
- reflecting on their work.

Balancing structure and guidance

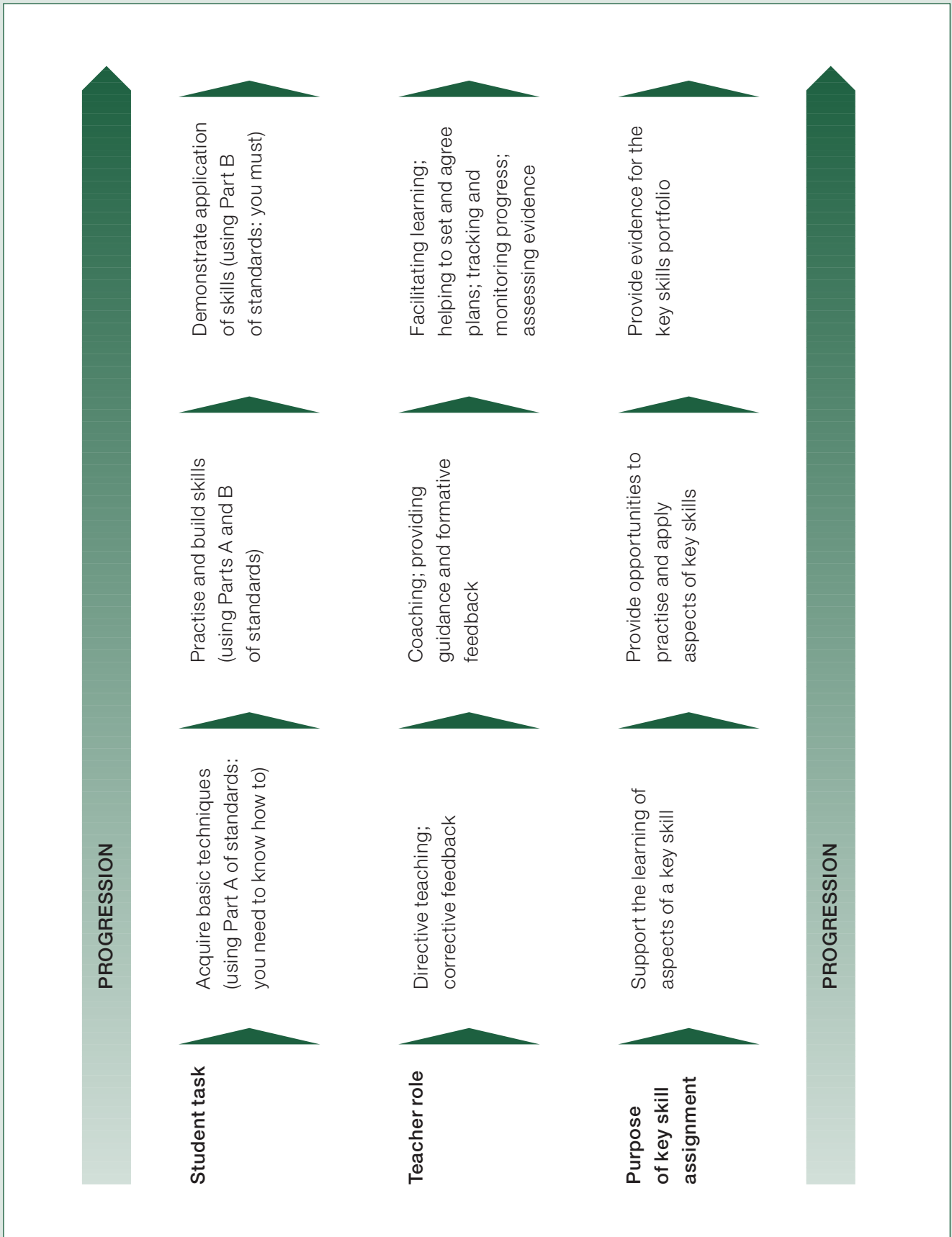
All assignments should provide a clear structure and guidance for the student, but it is important – particularly at Level 3 – not to provide so much guidance that the student cannot demonstrate the right degree of independence and autonomy.

How do key skills assignments fit into the continuum of skill development?

The continuum of skill development (see Figure 1) is a model that sets out three stages of acquiring, practising and applying key skills. The model is based on a progression from left to right. In the real world, students will start at various points on the continuum and will sometimes circle back on themselves as they find that they have not mastered some earlier stage in the process.

Key skills assignments may be used at any stage in this continuum. Some assignments will focus on acquiring basic techniques; some will provide opportunities to practise and build skills. Ultimately, however, an effective key skills assignment will provide evidence for a key skills portfolio.

Figure 1 Continuum of Skill Development



Key skills in national qualifications

To be accredited in the National Qualifications Framework, qualifications have to satisfy stringent criteria. One of these criteria is that they should identify opportunities for developing and generating evidence for Communication, Application of Number and Information and Communication Technology at the appropriate levels. GCSE, AS, A-level, GNVQ and VCE specifications must also identify these opportunities for Working with Others, Improving Own Learning and Performance, and Problem Solving. This process is known as signposting.

Signposting

Signposting is about opportunities. Signposts in main subject specifications indicate opportunities to incorporate key skills into the teaching and assessment of a unit. However, signposting only points the way – key skills will not be achieved unless the teacher's scheme of work provides the relevant opportunities for students to practise and demonstrate their skills.

Many qualifications (eg GCSEs, AS and A-levels, GNVQs and VCEs) have grade descriptions in their subject criteria and/or Performance Descriptions. These are used by examiners when writing mark schemes and assessing students' work. It can be a useful exercise for students to study these criteria and see how they emphasise skills at least as much as knowledge. They can be found on the QCA website at www.qca.org.uk.

Keys to Attainment

Keys to Attainment are included in the specifications for GNVQs VCEs, and Applied GCSEs and A-levels. They show where the units contain clear opportunities for generating key skills portfolio evidence. The unit assignments are written in such a way that, as students complete them, they can expect to produce evidence that can be assessed for key skills and can contribute to their key skills portfolio. However, this is not automatic and such evidence must be assessed and internally verified in the usual way and must be indexed in the key skills portfolio.

Developing key skills assignments

Figure 2 shows the steps to be followed when developing key skills assignments.

Assignments can be developed by individual teachers or by small groups. It is not usually effective for a group to try to write an assignment, but it can be helpful to have an initial brainstorming session with the team of colleagues teaching on the same course.

This can generate some creative ideas for assignments, which an individual teacher can write up into a first draft. This draft can then be discussed by the team. In any case, it is always helpful to involve more than one person in the development process.

Figure 2 Steps for developing key skills assignments



Identifying the context

For a main subject teacher, the first step is to identify the contexts where key skills opportunities occur naturally or can be enhanced in their particular subject. The signposts in the subject specification are a good starting point for this but they are neither mandatory nor complete. In any case, key skills are about activity and application, not just knowledge, so the real opportunities lie not in the specification but in how teachers deliver the learning programme. The real signposts are those that an individual teacher identifies in their particular scheme of work.

Many schools and colleges audit their courses using the signposting process. Each teacher in each subject area (including teachers responsible for enrichment activities) identifies the opportunities for key skills development and evidence in their area. Students then use these signposts to select and map the opportunities they feel are most relevant and appropriate to their own interests and aspirations.

The Key Skills Support Programme publication *Key skills resource manual* includes an INSET session on signposting.

Many teachers have found coursework a fruitful context for key skills, which is to be expected since this is usually the most active and student-centred part of a course.

Outlining the assignment

The next step is to produce the outline of an assignment, which meets the learning and/or assessment requirements of the main subject context. There is no need to go into detail yet, but it is sensible to clarify at this early stage:

- the purpose of the assignment
- the scenario (if any)
- what students will have to do
- what evidence they will be expected to produce.

Identifying the key skills opportunities

Once the main structure of the assignment is in place, it is possible to identify where the key skills occur naturally, or where they can be enhanced without distorting the primary purpose of the assignment.

Which skills?

Most assignments provide evidence opportunities for one key skill, but it is good practice to aim to include two or more key skills in a single assignment. In real life, tasks seldom lend themselves neatly to one particular approach; a range of skills may be used together. The key skills are therefore interrelated. Effective assignments provide opportunities for students to see links between issues and processes. Combining key skills encourages lateral thinking and innovative ways of interrogating information. It also enables students to claim multiple key skills units, including wider key skills, within a single assignment.

Planning matrix

The assignment planning matrix in Appendix 2 is a useful tool for brainstorming key skills opportunities to include in an assignment. Appendix 2 (on pages 20–21) provides an example of using the matrix for Level 3 key skills in the context of AS Business Studies.

There are two ways to use the matrix. First, insert the title and aim of the assignment in the box in the middle of the matrix. Then either:

- think about each key skill in turn and jot down where opportunities may arise in the assignment

or:

- think through the assignment in order and make notes on which key skills are used for each step or task.

Either approach will work as long as you consider how the six key skills can work together.

Which level?

Assignments may integrate key skills at the same level as the main qualification, so A-level assignments would integrate key skills at Level 3 and Applied GCSE assignments would integrate key skills at Level 2. However, this need not be the case. For example, there is no reason why a VCE assignment should not incorporate Information and Communication Technology at Level 2, or a GCSE assignment incorporate a component of Communication at Level 3. The level you choose depends on your students' skills, the demands of the assignment, and your students' ability to work independently.

Be careful not to assume that a student's key skill level is the same as the level of course they are enrolled on. Students may be taking an advanced level course but not have developed Information and Communication Technology skills or Application of Number skills even as far as Level 2. Similarly, students may have obtained a good grade in their GCSE English exam but not developed their discussion or presentation skills to key skill Communication Level 2.

This is a summary of the main differences between the levels in Communication, Application of Number and Information and Communication Technology. A detailed account for each key skill can be found on pages 8–9 of Guidance; Comm, AoN, ICT. Progression in Working with Others, Improving Own Learning and Performance, and Problem Solving is based on the same principles. A detailed account for each of these can be found on pages 6–7 of Guidance; WWW, IOLP, PS.

- **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.
- **Level 4** requires candidates to have substantial autonomy and responsibility for managing activities and for identifying how the key skills relate to their situation. It recognises ability to develop a strategy for using key skills over an extended period of time, monitor and critically reflect on progress and adapt strategy, as necessary, to achieve the quality of outcomes required.

The Key Skills Support Programme publication *Key skills resource manual* includes an INSET session on writing assignment briefs. The *Handbook for coordinators* includes advice and guidance on quality assurance of assignment briefs.

Drafting the assignment brief

The assignment brief should include:

- the title – short but informative
- an overview – introduces the assignment, setting out its purpose and how it relates to the main subject
- the task/s – what the student has to do
- the outcome – what the student has to produce and hand in
- resources – materials provided with the assignment, or guidance as to where they can be found, as appropriate
- deadlines – when the assignment was set and when it must be handed in
- key skills map – shows exactly which key skills will be developed and/or what evidence should be produced.

It is important to remember that, as the level of key skills rises, the assignment brief must reflect the degree of independence and autonomy students will need to show at each key skill level.

Assignment briefs or tasks should be included with each piece of portfolio evidence. These should provide information about the task set, its purpose and expected outcome and, where required, its intended audience. Where support has been given (eg in the form of reading lists supplied) this should also be indicated.

Guidance; Comm, AoN, ICT

Key skills evidence requirements

Key skills portfolios must include:

- the evidence required to meet the demands of Part B of the standards
- where the key skills standard requires it, annotated drafts of student work showing process and development.
- records of any documents used in researching a topic – at Level 1, these may be provided by the teacher; at Level 2 the student can be guided; at Level 3, the student can select from within sources identified by the teacher
- samples of source materials obtained (at Levels 2 and 3)
- for Information and Communication Technology and Application of Number, a commentary by the student about the project stating their purpose for obtaining information and describing:
 - how their results met the purpose of the assignment
 - how they checked that the results made sense.

The QCA Guidance – especially for Application of Number and Information and Communication Technology – often specifies that the evidence must show a process of learning, planning and development, including checking. For example:

- *N1.2 ... must include records of how the candidate has checked that the results make sense*
- *N2.3 ... must describe both the methods used and what the results of calculations mean...*
- *N3.1 ... evidence of planning must include a clear description of the activity and its purpose...*
- *ICT1.2 ... annotated drafts of work...*
- *ICT2.3 ... evidence of how the candidate has developed the presentation...*
- *ICT3.2 ... evidence of a clear planning process...*

Witness statements may sometimes be used as evidence of development.

These can include:

- witness statements and/or records of observations
- a screen dump showing file structure as evidence of saving (Information and Communication Technology).

For Working with Others, Improving Own Learning and Performance, and Problem Solving, the portfolio must also include a completed proforma that will help structure and order the portfolio. A blank pro forma (or similar) will be supplied by the awarding body.

Linking key skills

By exploiting the links between key skills, and selecting evidence carefully, students can use the evidence from one activity to meet the criteria for more than one key skill. For example, many assignments involve group discussions before, while and after the work is completed. Students can collect evidence showing how they took part in these discussions. This could be a witness statement of their discussion, or notes they took themselves. With this evidence, they can claim credit for Communication 1.1, 2.1a or 3.1a, depending on the type of discussion and the contribution they made, and may also have evidence for Working with Others, Improving Own Learning and Performance, and Problem Solving (see Appendix 1).

If, at the end of the assignment, a student gives a short talk or a presentation about their findings, they may claim Communication 2.1b (give a talk) or Communication 3.1b (give a presentation). They may be able to combine this with Application of Number 1.3, 2.3 or 3.3 (present findings), or Information and Communication Technology 1.3, 2.3, or 3.3 (present information). The evidence would be their notes for the talk, a witness statement from you about the quality of the presentation, or a PowerPoint presentation with notes.

Appendix 1 illustrates the links between key skills at Level 2. By using this table, you can identify where the links between key skills occur and maximise the chances that evidence will meet the criteria for multiple key skills. A similar table can be produced for Levels 2 and 3.

Tips for writing assignment briefs

- **Make sure that the purpose of the assignment is clear and explicit.**
- **Have a logical structure for the assignment – appropriate to the level.**
- **Address the student directly in your writing – use ‘you’.**
- **Avoid the passive wherever possible.**
- **Keep paragraphs short and to the point.**
- **Write in short sentences.**
- **Use words the student will know, and define new technical terms.**
- **Use bullets or numbered lists as appropriate.**
- **Include examples and models for the students to work with where appropriate.**
- **Plan how your layout and use of headings can ensure a clear, uncluttered effect.**
- **Consider how much freedom you will give the students to modify what they have to do.**
- **Above all, remember that students invest a lot of time and effort in carrying out assignments – make sure that you write them in such a way that this effort is rewarding and productive.**

From Using and developing key skills assignments – guide to good practice, KSSP, Learning for Work

Reviewing the assignment brief

It is very disheartening for students to complete an assignment as they have been told to, only to be 'failed' on key skills because the assignment was incapable of delivering the key skills evidence it had promised. It is also important that assignments' level of demand is standardised across the centre. Every key skills assignment should go through a quality assurance process before it is delivered to students. Your school or college should have clear procedures for quality assurance, including internal reviewing of assignment briefs.

Internal reviewing of assignment briefs:

- helps the author
- widens support for and ownership of the assignment brief
- produces better assignment briefs
- helps students to produce better work.

The internal verifier or reviewer plays the role of 'critical friend'; they are not there to critique the merits of the assignment from the standpoint of the main subject, but rather to comment on the key skills aspects. They can provide a second opinion on whether the assignment will meet the key skills assessment criteria and enable students to develop a portfolio of evidence for their key skills qualification. As critical friend, they may also be able to suggest ways in which the assignment could be revised to make it more effective and perhaps to provide evidence for a wider range of key skills. To promote standardisation across a centre, it may be helpful for the internal reviewer to be from a different department or faculty.

The reviewer should ask the following questions, at least.

- 1 Does this assignment provide appropriate key skills evidence opportunities?
- 2 Is it at the right level?
- 3 Does it have a clear purpose?
- 4 Are the instructions clear and not too leading?

A checklist for evaluating assignments is included in Appendix 3. This checklist could be used for all the key skills assignments in your centre. This procedure not only provides evidence of quality assurance, it encourages teachers and lecturers to share their ideas and work collaboratively across subject areas.

Reports from Standards Moderators are another source of guidance for revising assignments. These reports usually provide details about the weaknesses and omissions in portfolios of evidence. They can alert you to the pitfalls to avoid in writing your own assignments. They are available from the awarding bodies (see Appendix 6).

Revising the assignment brief

The draft assignment brief can now be finalised in the light of comments received.

The last job is to prepare the front sheet for the assignment. It is helpful for it to record:

- the name of the centre
- the awarding body
- the centre number (for the awarding body)
- the student's name
- the course, subject and unit to which it relates
- the title of the assignment
- the tutor's name
- the date the assignment was given out
- the date it must be completed and handed in
- which key skills components are covered.

A sample front sheet is included in Appendix 4, but many awarding bodies provide standard forms that you may prefer to use.

Assessment sheets

You will also need to produce the forms that will be used by your key skills assessors, though these will not be given out with the assignment brief. There must be space on the form for written feedback from the assessor, preferably with separate comments on each component being assessed.

The key skills assessment form, when completed, provides:

- feedback to the student, explaining the assessment decisions
- evidence for Internal Verifiers and Standards Moderators that the work has been assessed by someone who understands the requirements of the key skills standards. The key skills assessment should be distinct from the main subject assessment, though the two assessments could be done by the same person.

QCA and many awarding bodies have produced suitable forms for assessment checklists and records, but you are not required to use them.

It must be clear that the evidence has been assessed against the relevant key skills assessment criteria. Where a candidate's work has been initially assessed for instance against specific NVQ, AVCE, GCSE, GNVQ, AS or A-level specifications, it should also be assessed for instance separately for key skills and appropriate feedback provided to the candidate. There must be clear signs of this assessment and feedback. (page 14)

Assessment of work against the key skills criteria should be carried out by someone with appropriate specialist expertise to understand the full implication of the standards. (page 18)

Guidance; Comm, AoN, ICT

Delivering the assignment to the students

Your assignment is written, approved and ready for use. But are the students ready for the assignment? Every key skills assignment must build on the skills included in Part A 'You need to know how to', which are amplified in the two QCA Guidance documents. Before handing out your key skills assignment, you should check that your students are competent and confident in handling the underpinning skills they will need for the activity. They may need directive teaching in some skills and/or revision and refreshment in others. Skills that are not used on a regular basis become rusty.

You may also need to clarify for students how much personal responsibility you will expect them to take for the assignment. Remember that key skills assess the *process* as well as the *product*. Students need clear encouragement and permission to work independently and responsibly. You must:

- steer a fine line between guiding your students and directing them on their assignment
- provide formative feedback and suggestions without being too prescriptive
- allow students the space to make mistakes but provide a safety net to keep them on course.

In a well-managed business, employees are properly briefed on the work they are expected to do and are given the chance to clarify any points they are not clear about. Assignments in learning programmes are no different.

It is not until students have completed an assignment, and it has been assessed, that you will know if the assignment has been successful in meeting its aims. It is good practice to undertake a further review of the assignment at this stage and in readiness for the next time it is used. You may wish to involve students in this review, using an adapted version of the checklist in Appendix 3.

Developing key skills assignments in other contexts

It will sometimes be the case that a student’s particular combination of subjects makes it difficult or even impossible for them to develop all the key skills that are relevant to their future needs, whether at university or in employment. Where this is the case, key skills can be developed and evidence can be produced in the context of enrichment programmes or a range of other activities that are interesting and relevant to the student.

In some cases, especially with voluntary or non-assessed activities, key skills evidence will arise naturally, without the need for a formal assignment brief. However, it is helpful both to the student and the assessor if it is established from the start that the student is intending to generate key skills evidence from the activity and will want it to be assessed.

The teacher can then identify which key skills are to be developed and what evidence is to be produced, in the same way as with the formal assignment briefs described above.

It is difficult, and sometimes impossible, to assess key skills achievements in retrospect.

Figure 3 shows some examples of how key skills evidence might be generated in wider contexts.

Figure 3 Generating key skills evidence



Appendix 1

Linking key skills at Level 2

Details about the test			
	Communication	Application of Number	Information and Communication Technology
1		Carry out at least one activity that includes tasks for all three of N2.1, N2.2, N2.3.	
2	2.1a Take part in a group discussion.		
3	2.1b Give a talk of at least four minutes.	2.3 ...present your findings...	2.3 Present combined information...
4	2.2 Read ... information from at least two documents...	2.1 Interpret information...	2.1 Search for and select information...
5			
6	2.2 ...summarise information from at least two documents...	2.2 ...carry out calculations... 2.3 Interpret the results...	2.2 Enter and develop the information...
7	2.3 Write ... documents...	2.3 ...present your findings...	2.3 Present combined information...
8			

Working with Others	Improving Own Learning and Performance	Problem Solving
Provide at least two examples of meeting the standard for WO2.1, WO2.2, WP2.3...	Provide at least two examples of meeting the standard for LP2.1, LP2.2, LP2.3...	Provide at least two examples of meeting the standard for PS2.1, PS2.2, PS2.3.
<p>2.1 Plan work with others.</p>	<p>2.1 Help set targets ... and plan...</p>	<p>2.1 Identify a problem ... and identify different ways of tackling it.</p>
<p>2.2 Work cooperatively towards achieving the required objectives.</p>	<p>2.2 Take responsibility ... using your plan ... help meet targets ... improve your performance.</p>	<p>2.2 Plan and try out at least one way...</p>
<p>2.3 Review your contributions and agree ways to improve...</p>	<p>2.3 Review progress ... provide evidence of your achievements.</p>	<p>2.3 Check if ... solved ... identify ways to improve...</p>

Appendix 2

Assignment Planning Matrix

AS Business Studies

COMMUNICATION LEVEL 3

Discuss/present	Read/synthesise information	Write ... documents
eg Types of transport; efficiency; advantages/disadvantages; questions to research. (See also Information and Communication Technology for presentations.)	Select relevant information for each country; eg types of transport, legislation, health and safety, etc.	Report on findings; compare and contrast types of transport. Make recommendations.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY LEVEL 3

Search for information	Enter and develop information	Present combined information
Research: CD-ROM, Internet, official reports (UK and France).	eg Develop and use spreadsheet for making calculations to compare costs, etc.	Write up work including text, image and number; possible link with Application of Number and Communication; option to present findings to group.

ASSIGNMENT

Title:

A comparison of methods of freight transport between UK and France.

WORKING WITH OTHERS LEVEL 3

Plan work with others	Seek to develop cooperation	Review work with others
Agree objectives; share information; agree roles, responsibilities and working arrangements.	Organise and carry out tasks; develop cooperation; share information; agree changes.	Agree degree of success; identify influential factors; agree improvements for future.

APPLICATION OF NUMBER LEVEL 3

Plan/get information	Carry out multistage calculations	Interpret and present results, and justify
Obtain data re costs, time, insurance, load capacity, etc. of rail/road/air. (Possible link with Information and Communication Technology.)	Calculate comparative costs, time, etc. of rail/road/air.	Compare costs, efficiency, etc. of rail/road/air and make and justify recommendations.

Aim:

To decide which method or methods of freight transport to use when transporting non-perishable goods between UK and France.

IMPROVING OWN LEARNING AND PERFORMANCE LEVEL 3

Set targets and plan	Take responsibility ... using plan	Review progress and achievements
Seek information; set realistic targets; identify action points; plan time; use support; review progress.	Manage time; choose ways of learning; adapt approach; reflect on progress; seek feedback.	Review use of learning; identify targets met; agree ways to further improve performance.

PROBLEM SOLVING LEVEL 3

Explore a problem and identify ways	Plan and implement	Check and review approach
Analyse problem; come up with and compare ways of tackling; choose one way and justify choice.	Make plan; implement plan; check progress and revise plan if necessary.	Check if problem has been solved; describe results; review approach and compare with possible alternatives.

Appendix 3

Key skills assignment checklist

	✓	Comments
Is the front sheet complete?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Is the assignment set in a relevant context?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Is the activity interesting?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Is the task clear and explicit?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Is the language used appropriate to the level of the assignment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Are the key skills opportunities clearly identified?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Can the student show an appropriate degree of independence and choice?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Does the activity require the student to apply knowledge, understanding and skills?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Is there scope for planning activities to cover more than one key skill?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Can the student easily access any necessary resources?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Is the time scale for completing the assignment realistic?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Does the activity enable the student to meet all the evidence requirements?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Are there any outstanding health and safety issues?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Does the assignment afford equal opportunity for all students?	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Appendix 4

Sample front sheet for assignment brief

Centre name _____

Awarding body _____

Centre number _____

Student _____

Course _____

Subject _____

Unit _____

Title of assignment

Tutor _____

Date issued _____

Date to be returned _____

Key skills components covered (including level)

Communication _____

Application of Number _____

Information and _____

Communication _____

Technology _____

Working with Others _____

Improving Own Learning _____

and Performance _____

Problem Solving _____

Appendix 5

Glossary

Note

The following abbreviations are used in this glossary.

Guidance; Comm, AoN, ICT

for *The key skills qualifications standards and guidance: communication, application of number, and information and communication technology; Levels 1–4 2004*.

Guidance; WWO, IOLP, PS

for *The wider key skills qualifications standards and guidance: working with others, improving own learning and performance, and problem solving; Levels 1–4 2004*.

Key skills policy and practice

for *Key skills policy and practice: your questions answered*.

Accuracy

(a) *In Communication*

Accuracy in written communication ‘includes the ability to punctuate, spell and apply the rules of grammar with accuracy at increasing levels of sophistication.’ Part A of the standards prescribes the skills required at each level. At Level 1, ‘one or two’ spelling mistakes may be tolerated, ‘as long as these are not repeated in the second document’. The same applies at Levels 2 and 3, but only ‘providing meaning is still clear’. However, fitness for purpose is an important factor. (Guidance; Comm, AoN, ICT page 29)

At all levels, learners must demonstrate the skill of proofreading, whether of hand-written or word-processed material.

(b) *In Application of Number*

The requirements for accuracy vary between the levels. For details on accuracy and checking, see Guidance; Comm, AoN, ICT: Level 1 page 55–56; Level 2 page 60; Level 3 page 66.

Evidence of checking for accuracy is required at all levels. At Levels 1–3 ‘where there is a series of calculations of the same type, evidence of checking at least the first few of each type should be recorded for assessment purposes. For the remainder, accurate results should confirm that effective checking has taken place’. (Guidance; Comm, AoN, ICT pages 55–56, 60, 66)

Adult literacy and adult numeracy

QCA defines adult literacy and adult numeracy skills as ‘the ability to read, write and speak in English/Welsh and to use mathematics at a level necessary to function at work and in society in general.’ (Guidance; Comm, AoN, ICT, page 4). The standards for Adult Literacy and Adult Numeracy at Levels 1 and 2 (which are for learners aged 16+) are aligned to the standards for Communication and Application of Number key skills, respectively, at these levels. The key skills tests at Levels 1 and 2 in Communication and Application of Number also act as the tests for Adult Literacy and Numeracy. Candidates who gain the Adult Literacy and Adult Numeracy certificates by passing these tests can progress to achieving the full key skills qualifications if they wish. In order to meet the full requirements of the internal assessment component of the key skills qualifications, candidates have to develop a suitable portfolio of evidence. (Guidance; Comm, AoN, ICT page 4) See also ‘Basic skills’.

Advanced

Advanced level qualifications are at Level 3 of the National Qualifications Framework and include AS levels, A-levels, VCEs, BTEC and OCR Nationals, NVQs at Level 3 and key skills at Level 3.

Assessment*(a) Formative assessment*

This is part of the feedback that a teacher provides during a learning programme to help the learner reflect on and review their progress. It is often referred to as 'assessment **for** learning' in contrast to 'assessment **of** learning' or summative assessment. It has no direct effect on the student's final result. For more information, see www.qca.org.uk/ages3-14/66.html.

(b) Summative assessment

This is the assessment which determines whether a candidate has achieved a qualification and, if appropriate, with what grade.

Assessor

The person responsible for the initial judgment of a candidate's performance against defined standards expressed as assessment criteria or mark schemes.

Awarding body

There are 17 awarding bodies offering key skills qualifications, including the unitary awarding bodies in England (AQA, Edexcel, OCR) WJEC in Wales and CCEA in Northern Ireland. They are listed on the QCA website www.qca.org.uk/keyskills under 'Contacts'.

Basic skills

A set of literacy and numeracy skills and associated qualifications designed for use with adult learners and available at entry level and Levels 1 and 2 of the National Qualifications Framework. These skills are increasingly referred to as 'Skills for Life'. QCA has developed standards for an Information and Communication Technology skill for life. See also 'Adult literacy and adult numeracy'.

Chart

For the purpose of the Application of Number key skill, it is not necessary to distinguish between 'chart' and 'graph'. QCA defines these as 'a representation of the relationship between variables such as categories and frequency data, or x and y coordinates. Examples include: pie or bar chart, histogram, pictogram, frequency polygon, frequency chart or diagram, single or multiple line graph, scatter graph with or without line of best fit'. (Guidance; Comm, AoN, ICT page 51)
See also 'Diagram'.

Complex

For the Communication key skill at Level 3, complex subjects include those that deal with abstract or sensitive issues, and lines of enquiry dependent on clear reasoning. The subject matter, as well as having a number of strands, must also be challenging to the individual candidate in terms of the ideas it presents (Guidance; Comm, AoN, ICT pages 43–44). At Level 3, the candidate must write two different types of documents, each one giving different information about complex subjects.

For Application of Number at Level 3, the activity from which evidence is taken must be complex, requiring candidates to consider carefully the nature and sequence of tasks when planning how to obtain and use information to suit their purpose. (Guidance; Comm, AoN, ICT page 68)

Diagnostic assessment

In the context of key skills, diagnostic assessment is the process which helps to identify the skill areas in which students are already competent and those in which they are in need of further development. See also 'Initial assessment'.

Diagram

QCA defines a diagram as any graphical method of representation other than a chart or graph where scale is or is not a factor (Guidance; Comm, AoN, ICT page 51). Examples include: scale drawing, plan or workshop drawing, circuit drawing, 3D representation, flow chart, critical path or network diagram, and organisation chart. See also 'Chart'.

Entry level

Entry level qualifications recognise basic knowledge and skills and the ability to apply learning in everyday situations under direct guidance and supervision. Key skills are not available at entry level.

Exemption

Key skills candidates can claim exemption from all or part of particular key skills qualifications (most commonly the external test) for up to three years from the date of the award of specific accredited proxy qualifications. See also 'Proxy qualifications'.

Expectation

The Secretary of State wishes to see key skill programmes offered to all post-16 learners. Where learners have not already achieved A*–C grades in GCSE English, Maths or Information and Communication Technology, their programmes should lead to the formal acquisition of the relevant key skills qualification/s at Level 2. Where young people are starting on advanced level programmes with the aim of pursuing a professional or higher level qualification post-19, then institutions should support them in gaining at least one relevant key skills qualification at Level 3. (Key skills policy and practice page 7)

Extended period

For the first three key skills at Level 4, an extended period of time is about three months.

External assessment

In England and Northern Ireland, the external assessment for the first three key skills takes the form of a test which samples from the whole standard at the appropriate level. The tests are externally set, taken under supervised conditions and externally marked. (Guidance; Comm, AoN, ICT page 14) See also 'Tests'.

For the wider key skills from September 2004, candidates will be required to give satisfactory answers to questions asked by an assessor (eg tutor, trainer, supervisor). The assessor will select these questions (the 'Part A questions') from a list supplied by the awarding body, in order to confirm candidates' knowledge and understanding of areas of Part A where the assessor cannot infer this from the portfolio of evidence. Candidates' answers should be recorded in note form, or in an audio or video format. These notes or records should be available to standards moderators/verifiers if required. Candidates will also have to include in their portfolio a completed pro forma that will help structure and order the portfolio. The blank pro forma (or similar) will be supplied by the awarding body.

Fitness for purpose

Key skills portfolio evidence should be appropriate for the wider context and purpose for which it was produced. See also 'Purposeful'.

Foundation

Foundation level qualifications are at Level 1 of the National Qualifications Framework and include GCSEs at grade D to G, Foundation GNVQs, NVQs at Level 1 and key skills at Level 1.

Funding

Brief guidance on the funding of key skills and basic skills provision in schools, colleges and work-based training can be found in *Key skills policy and practice*.

Grading

There are no grades for key skills.

Graph

See 'Chart'.

Image

Information and Communication Technology and Communication both require the use of images. Examples include models, plans, sketches, diagrams, pictures, graphs and charts. Whatever form the image takes, it must be fit for purpose and must aid understanding of the written or spoken text.

At Levels 1 and 2 of Communication, candidates must use at least one image **either** to obtain information **or** to convey information in a discussion **or** a talk **or** a document they write. At Level 3, candidates must use an image or other support material in their presentation and at least once more – either to obtain information **or** to convey information in a document they write.

At Levels 1, 2 and 3 of Information and Communication Technology, candidates must use at least one example of an image (as well as examples of text and of number).

A table of text or numbers does not count as an image for Information and Communication Technology or for Communication. (Guidance; Comm, AoN, ICT page 27)

Independent assessment

All qualifications in the National Qualifications Framework must include a form of independent assessment or an alternative approved by the regulatory authorities (QCA, ACCAC, CCEA). For key skills, this requirement is met by external assessment (qv).

Information

Where the standard for the key skill Information and Communication Technology, at every level, refers to 'information', this can take the form of text and/or images and/or numbers.

Initial assessment

In the context of key skills, initial assessment is the process of identifying the appropriate level at which a student should start their key skills learning programme. This may vary from one skill to another. See also 'Diagnostic assessment'.

Inspection

Brief guidance on Ofsted and ALI inspection of key skills provision in schools, colleges and work-based training can be found in *Key skills policy and practice*.

Intermediate

Intermediate level qualifications are at Level 2 of the National Qualifications Framework and include GCSE at grade A*–C, Intermediate GNVQs, NVQs at Level 2 and key skills at Level 2.

Internal assessment

Internal assessment of key skills is organised by the centre. It focuses on the requirements of Part B of the standards, is based on a portfolio of evidence, is internally assessed and externally moderated. (Guidance; Comm, AoN, ICT page 14)

Internal verification

This is the process through which an identified person in a centre ensures that the standards of assessment in the centre are consistent both across the centre and with national standards. Key skills internal verifiers do not require particular qualifications but should be competent at the level of key skill that they are verifying. The awarding bodies offer training for internal verifiers. An internal verifier is often referred to as an 'IV'.

Interpersonal skills

Candidates for the wider key skills are encouraged to develop and apply their interpersonal skills eg skills in responding appropriately to others, offering support and encouragement, communicating their ideas and needs, accepting constructive feedback, helping to resolve conflict. (Guidance; WWO, IOLP, PS pages 20, 40) See also 'Process skills'.

Moderation

The process through which internal assessment is monitored by an awarding body to ensure that it is valid, reliable, fair and consistent with the required national standards. Each centre will be allocated a standards moderator for key skills. This role is sometimes referred to as external verifier.

National Qualifications Framework

The National Qualifications Framework was created by the 1997 Education Act and includes all external qualifications that are accredited by QCA (ACCAC in Wales and CCEA in Northern Ireland), plus degrees and other higher-level qualifications which are regulated by the universities and QAA. A revised version of the NQF comes into effect on 1 September 2004.

Objectives

The purposes for working together that are shared by the people involved in an activity for Working with Others. They may be set by a tutor, supervisor or project leader, or by members of the group or team, depending on the level. (Guidance; WWO, IOLP, PS pages 22, 28, 34)

Portfolio

Key skills candidates have to organise and present evidence of how they have met the requirements of the standards, usually in a portfolio. This is usually a file of hard copy but may be an electronically based storage-and-retrieval system. (Guidance; Comm, AoN, ICT page 14)

Problem

There is a problem when there is a need to bridge a gap between a current situation and a desired situation. (Guidance; WWO, IOLP, PS pages 60–61, 65, 71)

Process skills

All the wider key skills standards include process skills eg skills in planning, target-setting, organising and carrying out activities and reviewing progress. These skills are the main focus of assessment. (Guidance; WWO, IOLP, PS pages 20, 40) See also 'Interpersonal skills'.

Proxy qualifications

Proxy qualifications are qualifications that have been agreed to assess the same knowledge and skills as aspects of the key skills qualifications. Because of this overlap, key skills candidates can claim exemption from all or part of particular key skills qualifications (most commonly the external test) for up to three years from the date of the award of the specific proxy qualification. For a current list of proxy qualifications, see the QCA website www.qca.org.uk/keyskills. See also 'Relaxation'.

Purposeful

Key skills evidence must be generated in the context of a task or activity that satisfies some purpose in the student's work or leisure. Evidence that is collected simply to satisfy the requirements of the key skills portfolio is not purposeful and does not meet the assessment requirement. See also 'Fitness for purpose'.

Qualification

All six key skills are qualifications and are included in the National Qualifications Framework (qv).

Relaxation

The relaxation ruling allows Foundation and Advanced Modern Apprentices who started on or after 1 September 2001, and who have achieved a grade A*–C GCSE in English and/or Maths within five years of the date of registration for the MA framework, to complete their frameworks without being required to take the Level 2 Communication and/or Application of Number key skills qualifications. This is distinct from the use of proxy qualifications (qv).

Specification

The complete description – including mandatory and optional aspects – of the content, the assessment arrangements and the performance requirements for a qualification. In the past, this has often been referred to as a ‘syllabus’. See also ‘Standards’.

Standards

From September 2004, the key skills units (specifications) will be referred to as the ‘key skills standards’.

Straightforward

(a) *Straightforward subjects* and materials are those that candidates commonly meet in the context in which they are working or studying. The content is put across in a direct way so that candidates can easily identify the information they need for their task. In Communication, sentence structures are simple and candidates will be familiar with the vocabulary.

(b) *Straightforward tasks* can be broken down into easily-managed steps and involve familiar resources and situations. (Guidance; WWO, IOLP, PS page 23)

Targets

Targets are the steps for helping to achieve personal, learning and/or career goals. Targets should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound (SMART). (Guidance; WWO, IOLP, PS pages 41, 48)

Tests

In England and Northern Ireland, assessment of the first three key skills includes a written test (see ‘External assessment’). Details can be found on the QCA website www.qca.org.uk/keyskills. There are no written tests for the wider key skills. Increasingly, tests at Levels 1 and 2 are available on-screen and on-demand. The tests for Communication and for Application of Number at Levels 1 and 2 also act as the tests for Adult Literacy and Adult Numeracy at these levels. (Guidance; Comm, AoN, ICT page 26)

Transferable

Key skills are transferable. This means simply that, once a student has developed a skill for the purpose of one context, they should be able to identify when and how to apply the same skill for another purpose in another context.

Witness statement

A statement signed by a competent person which confirms that the candidate has completed the activity in question at the required standard. A witness statement should not be the sole form of evidence. Assessors are responsible for judging the validity of witness statements. They are most likely to be used in Communication (Guidance; Comm, AoN, ICT pages 33, 37, 43 and 49), Information and Communication Technology (Guidance; Comm, AoN, ICT pages 80 and 84/5) and in the wider key skills.

Note

Copies of the following publications can be ordered from:

QCA Publications
PO Box 99
Sudbury
Suffolk CO10 2SN
Tel 01787 884444
Fax 01787 312950

The key skills qualifications standards and guidance: communication, application of number, and information and communication technology
(ref. QCA/04/1272; price: £10)

The wider key skills qualifications standards and guidance: working with others, improving own learning and performance, and problem solving
(ref. QCA/04/1294; price: £10)

Copies of *Key skills policy and practice: your questions answered* can be ordered free of charge from:

Department for Education and Skills
Key Skills Policy Team
Room E3c
Moorfoot
Sheffield S1 4PQ
Tel 0114 259 3759
key.skills@dfes.gsi.gov.uk

All three publications can be downloaded from the QCA website www.qca.org.uk/keyskills.

Appendix 6

Useful addresses

ACCAC (Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales)
Castle Buildings
Womanby Street
Cardiff CF10 1SX
Tel 029 2037 5400
www.ccw.org.uk

ALI (Adult Learning Inspectorate)
Spring Place
Coventry Business Park
Herald Avenue
Coventry CV5 6UD
Tel 0870 240 7744
www.ali.gov.uk

AQA (Assessment and Qualifications Alliance)
Devas Street
Manchester M15 6EX
Tel 0161 953 1180
Publications 0161 953 1170
www.aqa.org.uk

ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network)
Wainbrook House
Hudds Vale Road
St George
Bristol BS5 7HY
Tel 0117 941 1126
Publications 0117 941 1448
www.asdan.co.uk

BSA (Basic Skills Agency)
Commonwealth House
1–19 New Oxford Street
London WC1A 1NU
Tel 020 7405 4017
Publications 0870 600 2400
www.basic-skills.co.uk

CCEA (Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment)
Clarendon Dock
29 Clarendon Road
Belfast BT1 3BG
Tel 028 9026 1200
Publications 028 9026 1228
www.ccea.org.uk

City & Guilds
1 Giltspur Street
London EC1A 9DD
Tel 020 7294 2468
www.city-and-guilds.co.uk

DfES (Department for Education and Skills)
Key Skills Policy Team
Room E3c
Moorfoot
Sheffield S1 4PQ
Tel 0114 259 3759
Publications 0845 602 2260
www.dfes.gov.uk/keyskills

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme
Gulliver House
Madeira Walk
Windsor
Berkshire SL4 1EU
Tel 01753 727400
www.theaward.cix.co.uk

Edexcel
Stewart House
32 Russell Square
London WC1B 5DN
Tel 0870 240 9800
Publications 01623 467467
www.edexcel.org.uk

Key Skills Support Programme (LSDA)
Regent Arcade House
19–25 Argyll Street
London W1F 7LS
Helpline 0870 872 8081
kssp@LSDA.org.uk
www.keyskillssupport.net

Key Skills Support Programme (Learning for Work)
The Cottage Office
Eightlands Road
Dewsbury
West Yorkshire WF13 2PF
Helpline 0845 602 3386
Publications 0117 971 9583
www.keyskillssupport.net

LSC (Learning and Skills Council)
Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Tel 0845 019 4170
www.lsc.gov.uk

LSDA (Learning and Skills Development Agency)
Regent Arcade House
19–25 Argyll Street
London W1F 7LS
Tel 020 7297 9000
Information Services 020 7297 9144
enquiries@LSDA.org.uk
www.LSDA.org.uk

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)
Coventry Office
Westwood Way
Coventry CV4 8JQ
Tel 024 7647 0033
Publications 0870 870 6622
www.ocr.org.uk

Ofsted
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE
Tel 020 7421 6800
Publications 0700 263 7833
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Outward Bound Trust
Watermillock
Penrith
Cumbria CA11 0JL
Tel 0870 5134 227
www.outwardbound-uk.org.uk

The Prince's Trust
18 Park Square East
London NW1 4LH
Tel 020 7543 1234
www.princes-trust.org.uk

QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority)
83 Piccadilly
London W1J 8QA
Tel 020 7509 5555
Publications 01787 884444
www.qca.org.uk/keyskills

UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service)
Rosehill
New Barn Lane
Cheltenham GL52 3LZ
Tel 01242 222444
Publications 01242 544903
www.ucas.ac.uk

Young Enterprise
Peterley House
Peterley Road
Oxford OX4 2TZ
Tel 01865 776845
www.young-enterprise.org.uk

What is the Key Skills Support Programme?

This support programme for schools and colleges with post-16 provision is funded by the DfES and the European Social Fund. The Programme provides teachers, lecturers and managers with information, advice, materials and training.

What are the priorities of the Programme?

The priorities of the Programme are to:

raise awareness and understanding of key skills

produce materials on teaching and learning key skills

provide practical advice, solutions, exemplars and models

provide training at conferences, workshops, courses and regional sessions.

The Programme is run by a consortium led by LSDA with partners including AoC, BTL e-learning, CDELL and CfBT.

What services are available?

A dedicated Key Skills Helpline is available on 0870 872 8081 every weekday to answer questions on key skills and provide information updates. The website on www.keyskillssupport.net provides news and information on key skills developments, resources, publications, consultancy support, training and conferences, contacts and links. Newsletters are published each term and sent to all maintained schools with post-16 provision and colleges in England.

There are links with the awarding bodies and with the parallel support programme for trainers in work-based learning, managed by Learning for Work (Helpline 0845 602 3386).

How can I find out more?

You can contact the Key Skills Helpline tel 0870 872 8081

or e-mail kssp@LSDA.org.uk

or visit the website

www.keyskillssupport.net

or the student website on

www.keyskills4u.com



department for
education and skills

