

## **Fundamental English and Mathematics Proficiencies Frequently Asked Questions**

In a letter to providers dated 12<sup>th</sup> September 2019, the DfE confirmed that applicants to teacher training programmes would no longer need to pass the skills tests as a requirement of entry. NASBTT and UCET welcomed this announcement, having long argued that the existing testing arrangements were no longer fit for purpose.

The following FAQs have been written to support providers in understanding the new arrangements for fundamental proficiencies. They do not replace guidance issued by the DfE and must be read in conjunction with their advice and guidance, including the ITT Criteria. We are grateful to NASBTT for its support in the drafting this guidance.

### **When do the new arrangements take effect?**

The new arrangements affect all candidates starting programmes of study on after the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020.

### **What if I have candidates starting before this date (e.g. staggered start dates or AO candidates)?**

Any applicant (including AO candidates) commencing a programme before the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 must undertake the skills tests. A reduced service will be offered at test centres across the UK to accommodate these candidates.

### **What is our responsibility under the new guidance?**

Under this new approach, Initial Teacher Training (ITT) providers are expected to assure English and mathematics knowledge of a trainee before Qualified Teacher Status or Early Years Teacher Status is awarded. ITT providers must, as an accreditation requirement, assure that trainees have these skills either during the selection process, or later during the training programme. In its 12 September letter, the DfE said that all teachers are expected to be competent in Fundamental English and mathematics. Before being recommended for QTS, trainees must be able to demonstrate competence in the following areas:

- Speaking, listening and communicating are fundamental to a teacher's role. Teachers should use standard English grammar, clear pronunciation and vocabulary relevant to the situation to convey instructions, questions, information, concepts and ideas with clarity. Teachers should read fluently and with good understanding.

- Writing by teachers will be seen by colleagues, pupils and parents and, as such, it is important that a teacher's writing reflects the high standards of accuracy their professional role demands. They should write clearly, accurately, legibly and coherently using correct spelling and punctuation.
- Teachers should use data and graphs to interpret information, identify patterns and trends and draw appropriate conclusions. They need to interpret pupil data and understand statistics and graphs in the news, academic reports and relevant papers.
- Teachers should be able to complete mathematical calculations fluently with whole numbers, fractions, decimals and percentages. They should be able to solve mathematical problems using a variety of methods and approaches including: estimating and rounding, sense checking answers, breaking down problems into simpler steps, and explaining and justifying answers using appropriate language.

### **How will Ofsted inspect fundamental skills?**

Ofsted will expect providers to comply with the requirements set out in the ITT compliance criteria:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/initial-teacher-training-criteria/initial-teacher-training-itt-criteria-and-supporting-advice>

Ofsted will simply continue to inspect ITT providers' recruitment and selection of trainees. Inspectors will continue to:

1. Ask providers about the processes and procedures in place to recruit and select trainees who are ready to begin training to teach.
2. Ask leaders how they are responding to the needs of individuals and groups of trainees. In particular, how they are adapting the training programme or pastoral arrangements for each new cohort of trainees.

Going forward, inspectors are likely to ask ITT providers how they:

- Identify any gaps in prospective trainees' fundamental English and mathematics skills, which will not be covered in the course content.
- Support trainees admitted to the training programme(s) who have identified gaps.
- Ensure any identified gaps are filled before course completion.

Ofsted will **not** expect you to have any particular recruitment and selection process. Ofsted will **not** expect evidence about recruitment to be presented in any particular manner.

### **Does this mean we have to explicitly teach fundamental English and mathematics on our programmes?**

No. Any work to address shortfalls in English and mathematics must be undertaken by the trainee teacher in addition to other aspects of their training. It is the trainee's responsibility to secure these fundamental skills, whereas responsibility for assurance lies with the ITT provider. Providers may wish to support some candidates with acquiring these skills but there is no expectation that programmes should be adapted to routinely teach these subjects.

### **Is there a specific way we should be assuring fundamental English and mathematics?**

No. Fundamental English and mathematics may be implemented, supported and assured in different ways by different ITT providers. Examples of how some providers are given below.

### **How do we quality assure/check that trainees have the functional skills needed?**

This could be done in a number of ways and at various stages prior to being awarded QTS. For example providers may wish to check some of these skills through the interview process, some of the skills can be easily verified while the trainee is on placement and other skills can be assured through the variety of written assignments/portfolio work that the trainee submits throughout their training period.

### **Do we have to write/implement our own tests?**

No. You may choose to introduce tests as part of your application process but this is not the only way of assuring the fundamental proficiencies of your candidates. If you already use testing and find this to be reliable, you may wish to continue to do so. However, providers are advised to take a holistic view of a candidate's proficiencies which will incorporate their experience, qualifications, degree type and class, application, performance at interview and self-declared competencies.

### **Do we have to rewrite our application process?**

This is unlikely. Work with providers suggests that most application and interview processes already look for many of the proficiencies needed. A simple review of your processes may identify areas where changes might be made but we do not anticipate that wholesale changes would be needed for most providers.

### **Can I accept applicants with gaps in their knowledge?**

Yes. The requirement is that the proficiencies are assured before QTS or EYTS is awarded. Therefore, there is now scope for candidates with minor gaps to develop these proficiencies over the course of the programme. A professional judgment will need to be made about the scale of the gaps in relation to the candidate's other skills and attributes and their capacity and ability to undertake this additional work alongside the normal programme of study.

### **How do we ensure comparability?**

Decisions around whether to accept a candidate with gaps in their knowledge may vary from provider to provider. This is also the case with many other facets of the application process, for example requirements to undertake SKE, acceptance of equivalent qualifications and acceptance of lower degree classes. These are all decisions which are trusted to the professional judgment of individual providers. By removing the requirement for skills tests, this aspect of a candidate's attributes is brought in line with others.

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