

Guidance on supporting students unlikely to achieve a Grade 4 in English Language at GCSE at KS4 or post-16

GCSE, Functional Skills (FS) and Entry Level Certificate (ELC): which one to choose?

This guidance provides some general support with choosing which English Language qualifications to select for students who are unlikely to achieve Grade 4 at GCSE. In many cases, schools and colleges will arrange a bespoke programme for each student, with students in the same teaching group following different paths. Feel free to contact teachingenglish@pearson.com if you'd like to discuss your context. Full details of each qualification are available on the webpages linked to below.

Overview to help making choices for KS4 or post-16

	Available UK/International	Guided learning hours (GLH)	Number of certifications per year/entry deadline	Students' work submitted by	Main age range	Style of content & assessment	Admin & paperwork (see details below)	Fees (2025-2026) updated each year on 1.8
ELC	UK & Int	60-120	1, in May/June. Enter by 21.2 each year.	15 May each year	14-16	Like GCSE	Around 3 steps	£31.20
EL FS 1-3	UK only	55 each	On demand. Register in autumn, ideally.	NA	14+	Life/work	Around 7 steps	£18.35
FS L1/2	UK only	55 each	On demand	NA	14+	Life/work	Around 9 steps	£11.95 each Reading/Writing. SLC free
GCSE 1EN0 or 1EN2	UK & Int	120	2*, in May/June & November. Enter by 4.10 for Nov and 21.2 for June each year.	15 May for summer; early November for November series	14+	Academic	Around 3 steps	£56.40

*The main assessment is in May/June. There are age restrictions in November.

[Access the latest fee information.](#)

Functional Skills in English

Functional Skills (FS) are qualifications in English that equip learners with the practical skills needed to live, learn and work successfully and the ability to apply these skills effectively to a range of purposes in the workplace and in other real-life situations. There are paper-based and on-screen (L1/2 only) assessment options.

What age are they suitable for?

Edexcel Functional Skills are available in **England only** from Entry 1 to Level 2. They are generally suitable for learners of all ages, although the contexts used make them more appropriate for students who are 14+. They're also a mandatory part of all 16-18 apprenticeship frameworks in England.

When can students sit the assessments?

The entry pattern for FS is flexible. Students can be entered for assessments at any time, and they can gradually work through the levels, sitting assessments when they're ready.

Do students have to pass at each level in order to progress to the next?

No, they don't. Students can start at whichever level (EL 1-3 or L1/2) they are ready to be assessed at. Many students will work towards L1 and then later do L2, but it is less usual to sit all the EL levels.

Assessment model (see [specifications](#) for full details)

NB for FS, students are assessed on speaking, listening and communicating (SLC) in groups. The times given are for the group to be assessed.

For EL FS writing there is a multiple choice spelling test at each level and there are always 2 longer writing tasks.

EL1

Component	Assessments	Total time in minutes for all tasks	Total marks for component
SLC	2 tasks	10	NA (pass/fail)
Writing	1 paper (5 questions)	50	30
Reading	1 paper (3 texts)	45	16

EL2

Component	Assessments	Total time in minutes for all tasks	Total marks for component
SLC	2 tasks	15	NA (pass/fail)
Writing	1 paper (6 questions)	50	35
Reading	1 paper (3 texts)	45	20

EL3

Component	Assessments	Total time in minutes for all tasks	Total marks for component
SLC	2 tasks	20	NA (pass/fail)
Writing	1 paper (5 questions)	50	36
Reading	1 paper (3 texts)	45	24

L1

Component	Assessments	Total time in minutes for all tasks	Total marks for component
SLC	2 tasks	30	NA (pass/fail)
Writing	1 paper	60	36
Reading	2 tests: 1 fiction and 1 non-fiction	60	30

L2

Component	Assessments	Total time in minutes for all tasks	Total marks for component
SLC	2 tasks	40	NA (pass/fail)
Writing	1 paper	60	36
Reading	1 paper	75	35

How does FS compare to GCSE?

FS English at L2 are equivalent in standard to GCSE grade 4, but are not equivalent in size, nor in content.

For several purposes, including funding and performance tables, FS are not considered to be 'equivalent' to GCSE, partly because of the size and partly because of the content covered.

FS L1 is equivalent in standard, but not size to GCSE grade 3.

Entry Level 3 FS is equivalent to just below GCSE Grade 1.

What about students with uneven performance across reading, writing, speaking and listening?

The tasks at each level are different. Usually, when you work with a student you have a good idea from practice tests of what level they are capable of achieving, and enter them at it. They must complete each assessment at the same level and they pass or fail it. To get L2 overall they must pass L2 on each of the 3 areas (reading [R]; writing [W] and speaking, listening and communication [SLC]). Students may be exempted from one of the three components (with the appropriate evidence) and still achieve the qualification.

Can a pass on a component be carried forward from one academic year to the next?

Achievement on individual components can be carried forward from one academic year to the next, providing there has not been a specification change. Registrations are valid for 5 years.

What progression routes are open to students with FS L2?

In FE, students may progress onto GCSE from L2 FS, although this is no longer required to meet funding requirements. In terms of being accepted post-16, most L3 courses accept L2 FS. L2 FS is acceptable for all levels of apprenticeships and T levels. Students must consult the individual college regarding the course they wish to apply for, for full details.

What paperwork/administration is there? (Please note, this is an overview only.)

Entry Level

- Register students, ideally in the autumn term (to get set up with an SV).
- Exams officer [downloads gold-padlocked assessment](#) for reading and writing when students are ready to be assessed.
- Appoint a Lead Internal Verifier. Submit a Lead Internal Verifier Declaration.
- Establish and document your internal verification processes.
- Complete assessment record sheet for SLC.
- Make video-recordings of 2 students at EL1, 1 at EL2 and 1 at EL3 on each activity/task for SLC.

- Receive a visit from a Standards Verifier.
- Submit marks for students.
- Make claims for students when they have passed all 3 components at a level.

Level 1/2

- Register students.
- Appoint a Lead Internal Verifier (Lead IV). Register a Lead Internal Verifier and complete the online OSCA training.
- Book paper-based or onscreen assessments for reading and writing using the guidance in the [information manual](#).
- Establish and document your internal verification processes.
- Complete assessment record sheet for SLC.
- Make video-recordings of 3 students on each task at each level for SLC.
- Receive a visit from a Standards Verifier.
- Submit marks for students.
- Make claims for students when they have passed all 3 components at a level.

Access arrangements

Please see the [guidance](#).

Funding arrangements

Funding can be used to offer FS to pre-16 and 16-19 year-olds. Funding eligibility for qualifications is confirmed for pre-16 year-olds on [section 96](#), and for 16-19 year-olds on the [funding hub](#). FS is eligible for 19+ funding.

[Entry Level Certificate \(ELC\) in English \(NEN0\)](#)

Edexcel's Entry Level Certificate in English has been designed specifically to align with GCSE English Language 9-1 (1EN0) and provide a progression route for lower attainers. The certificate provides a springboard to GCSE, and supports advancement in English by cementing students' core understanding. The ELC is paper-based only. There are no on-screen testing options.

What age are they suitable for?

The ELC has been designed with KS4 students in mind, so for students aged 14-16. It could also be offered to post-16 students if they are intending to proceed to GCSE English Language, or as a stepping-stone, confidence-building qualification.

When can students sit the assessments?

Students can sit the assessments when they are ready. Their work is only submitted once a year by 15 May prior to a summer certification. The course is therefore usually delivered on a one-year or two-year programme (September to May/June) and students can be taught in parallel to those being prepared for GCSE English Language using differentiated teaching resources.

Do students have to pass at each level in order to progress to the next?

No, they don't. As ELC is generally delivered in schools, teachers make a judgement about whether that student will be assessed at EL1, 2 or 3 at the end of the course.

Assessment model (see [specification](#) for full details)

EL1

Component	Assessments	Total time in minutes for all tasks	Total marks for component
Speaking and listening	2 tasks	4-8	20
Writing	2 tasks: 1 transactional & 1 creative	30	30
Reading	2 tests: 1 fiction and 1 non-fiction	60	50

EL2

Component	Assessments	Total time in minutes for all tasks	Total marks for component
Speaking and listening	2 tasks	6-10	20
Writing	2 tasks: 1 transactional & 1 creative	60	30
Reading	2 tests: 1 fiction and 1 non-fiction	70	50

EL3

Component	Assessments	Total time in minutes for all tasks	Total marks for component
Speaking and listening	1 task	4-6	10
Writing	2 tasks: 1 transactional & 1 creative	80	40
Reading	2 tests: 1 fiction and 1 non-fiction	90	50

How does the ELC compare to GCSE and FS?

The ELC offers an assessment style which is similar to that of GCSE English Language. The reading texts (including fiction and literary non-fiction), writing stimuli (including creative writing) and speaking and listening tasks are designed to feed into/prepare students for GCSE English Language.

The texts and contexts in FS are oriented towards 'real life' and 'work' situations. They are intended to equip students with the skills needed to operate in English in real life.

The entry patterns for ELC are less flexible than those for FS. If you teach students that have poor attendance or who are only with you for a short period of time, FS is more suitable.

What about students with uneven performance across reading, writing, speaking and listening?

The tasks at each level are different. Usually, when you work with a student you have a good idea from practice tests of what level they are capable of achieving, and enter them at it. Students must achieve 70 marks overall at EL1, EL2 or EL3 in order to pass and certificate at that level. If they do not achieve 70 marks across the three components at the level they were entered for, they will not be able to 'drop down' to the level below.

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What progression routes are open to students with ELC?

Students who have achieved ELC at EL3 can progress to FS L1/2 and/or to GCSE.

What paperwork/administration is there? (Please note, this is an overview only.)

- Enter students by 21 February each year for a summer certification.
- Enter students' marks and submit a sample of their work by 15 May each year for a summer certification.
- Complete an assessment record and authentication sheet for each student.
- Video-recording of the speaking and listening component **is not required**.

How long will the qualifications be available in their current form?

The current ELC specification was first teaching in 2017. There are currently no indications that the specification will be amended.

Access arrangements

There is guidance in the [specification](#) of the support that may be provided to students at each entry level. In addition, ELC is covered by the [JCQ access arrangements regulations and guidance](#).

Funding arrangements

Funding can be used to offer the ELC to pre-16 and 16-19 year-olds. Funding eligibility for qualifications is confirmed for pre-16 year-olds on [section 96](#), and for 16-19 year-olds on the [funding hub](#). ELC is not eligible for the condition of funding, so post-16 students can do it, but they also need to do another English qualification that is eligible, such as GCSE or FS. ELC is not eligible for 19+ funding.