Functional Skills paper-based, on-demand – at a glance

Centre makes entries via Interchange
- Question papers arrive at centre within 5 working days

Centre conducts assessment
- Once a question paper package is opened, assessment must be conducted within a **maximum 5 working day period**.

Centre returns all papers to OCR within 15 working days after entries are made
- Both used and unused Question papers from entries made must be returned.

1.1   What is the same?

The new approach for Functional Skills is very similar to the previous 'monthly assessment windows' approach.

The entry process, examination regulations and return of question papers is the same in the new on-demand approach as the previous 'assessment windows' approach.

For exam regulations centres should refer to the new *Instructions for Conducting OCR Functional Skills and Cambridge progression Qualification Examinations* document, which is based on the JCQ Instructions for Conducting Examinations and can be found in the Exams Officer section of the OCR website. Centres can continue to teach during the 5 working day assessment window.

1.2   What is different?

The difference with on - demand is that centres can now make entries at any time and schedule their own assessment windows.

When OCR receives entries, this triggers despatch of papers which then arrive at the centre within 5 working days. A centre has up to **15 working days** from the date entries are made, before returning all papers (used and unused) to the nominated OCR Examiner.

Within this period, the assessment can only be taken by candidates within the **5 working days** after a question paper package is opened (including the day the package is opened). Candidates cannot have more than one attempt at the paper they have been entered for.

All papers must be returned as soon as possible after the final assessment has been sat and all used and unused papers returned within 15 working days from the date entries were made.
- 'Working days' are defined as Monday to Friday, and so Saturday, Sunday and Bank holidays are not included in the overall working day count (see 1.4 for guidance on scheduling assessment on a weekend and around national holidays).

1.3   How do the timescales work for the new approach?

It is recognised that centres may need time to organise papers before beginning a 5 day assessment window, and so we have included additional time for the administration of papers in the new approach.

OCR has provided a "calculator" to assist centres with working out the new timescale requirements. This is available on the OCR website.

Managing the assessment usage

- A centre will need to ensure that they record the date of entry for papers, so that they can return all papers within the prescribed timescale.

- Once assessments are opened (i.e. once a script packet is opened so a candidate can take the assessment), the 5 day countdown of the assessment usage period starts. It is the centre's responsibility to ensure no more assessment takes place beyond the 5 days for these papers. The 5 days must be consecutive working days or 7 calendar days (if assessment is sat at the weekend, see section 1.4).

- Centres can make new entries without waiting until after papers from previous entries are returned. This means that a centre can operate multiple 5 day assessment periods over time. In this case, the above rules apply to each separate set of entries. Centres should ensure that they accurately record the date of entry of papers for a set of entries, so that they can clearly manage return of papers up to 15 working days after entry.

- Assessments are coded with a variant number, to help centres track use of assessment within a period if they wish. However, the method of tracking the time period the papers have been in the centre is at the discretion of the centre.

- For ICT assessments, the variant number on a paper is associated with a set of data-files, available to download under the 'Pre-release materials' link of the associated ICT level page on the OCR website. Centres have two options for accessing the relevant data-files:

  - The invigilator may set out the test papers up to 45 minutes before the test starts, and so the centre can identify the variant number at this point and make the correct set of data-files available;

  - The centre can download and unzip all data-files to the local PCs before assessment takes place, and then direct candidates to the correct set when the test starts

- Assessment variants are regularly changed – where it is identified that a centre has issued an expired assessment to a candidate for live assessment, OCR will investigate this as a malpractice case. To ensure that this does not happen, a centre must return ordered papers within the identified timescale.

1.4   Can a centre still plan assessment times in advance?

Yes, this is still possible. A centre will need to adjust the time at which they enter candidates for a centre - planned assessment period, so that entries trigger despatch of papers 5 working days before planned assessment.

What if a centre has planned assessment around a weekend?
In these circumstances, OCR will accept that an assessment window can be 7 calendar days (which would be equivalent to 5 working days, with two of the 7 days being non-working days).

What happens if a centre makes entries just before a national holiday?
When calculating the 15 working day period, centres should also consider that OCR may be closed for some of the holiday dates and so papers may take longer to arrive than advertised. For example, entries made on Christmas Eve will not arrive in the centre until the New Year. When requesting papers around national holiday times, please contact OCR to confirm dates on which offices are closed.

1.5   Answers to common questions

- **Are the ways entries are made different to the current process for Functional Skills?** No - entries are still made via Interchange.

- **How long does it take for papers to arrive at my centre once I've ordered them?** Papers take up to 5 working days to arrive and so centres should make entries the week before they anticipate needing the papers. By managing when the assessment window begins after entries are made, this can give the centre at least 10 working days (2 weeks) between entry and use of the assessment.

- **When will I be invoiced for any paper orders?** Invoicing for entries is up front so centres should only make entries for the number of papers that they require for each assessment window.

- **What types of entries are allowed?** Both named and unnamed routes are still permitted.

- **How long can I keep the papers in my centre for?** Papers cannot be retained indefinitely by a centre and must be used within the 15 working days after entries are made.

- **What if I don't use all of the papers I have ordered?** All papers must be returned to OCR – both used and unused, using an appropriate secure postage method.

- **How long after I have returned papers do I get results?** Results can be available on Interchange in as little as 15 days from the day the OCR Examiner receives the papers.

- **Does this new on-demand model also apply to Cambridge Progression qualifications?** Not currently, although we will soon be announcing changes to the way Cambridge Progression assessment is offered.

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- **Do the on-demand papers look the same as previous Functional Skills assessment?** There have been minor changes to the way papers are presented. This is outlined in the OCR Functional Skills admin guide.

- **What if my centre wishes to schedule an assessment window shortly after any holiday period when the centre is closed?** We would suggest that you schedule your assessment windows to take account of any extended holiday period, so that papers can be delivered to the centre while centre staff are still available This will ensure that papers are stored securely, and returned within the 15 working days following entry. If centres have specific requirements or queries related to this please contact OCR's Customer Contact Centre on 02476 851509.

- **Can I make entries earlier than 5 days before I need assessment?** No, OCR cannot accept entries in advance of the 5 day despatch period. As soon as entries are made the 15 working days to return question papers will begin.