



# **Functional Skills**

## **English**

Level 2 09499

### **OCR Report to Centres August 2015**

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It is also responsible for developing new specifications to meet national requirements and the needs of students and teachers. OCR is a not-for-profit organisation; any surplus made is invested back into the establishment to help towards the development of qualifications and support, which keep pace with the changing needs of today's society.

This report on the examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the examination.

OCR will not enter into any discussion or correspondence in connection with this report.

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### OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

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## Functional Skills English Writing – Level 2

### Overview

The Functional Skills English Writing assessment is one of three to be completed by candidates in order to gain the qualification at Level 2. The other assessments are for Reading and Speaking, Listening & Communication.

The Functional Skills English Writing assessment at Level 2 consists of one 55 minute test, which focuses on the coverage and range as outlined in the Standards. Candidates are expected to write two documents within this time and to demonstrate 'functionality' in terms of content, accuracy of spelling, punctuation and grammar, format and structure.

### General Comments

The performance of candidates has varied very little from the previous academic year. For the vast majority of candidates the stimulus material and tasks appeared accessible and of interest, with both tasks being completed. On occasions, candidates were entered who were clearly not operating at Level 2 Writing.

#### 2W1 (Content)

The majority of responses were effectively organised into paragraphs. Most candidates used information from the stimulus material and scenario given, although only a few were able to expand on this information. Occasionally, candidates appeared unaware of the purpose of the writing tasks. A few candidates produced very brief responses.

#### 2W2 (Spelling)

Spelling was quite good in the majority of responses with many candidates achieving high marks. Common errors included 'writting', a multitude of ways for spelling 'safety', 'benifit', 'dissapointing', 'alot', 'oppurtunity', 'perform' (for perform), 'opion' (for opinion), companys (for companies) and 'aswell'. Errors in homophones included 'your/you're', 'there/their/they're', 'fair/fare' 'to/too' and 'quite/quiet'.

#### 2W3 (Punctuation)

Use of punctuation was generally sound for demarcation of sentences. Some candidates demonstrated a tendency to comma splice and struggle with complex sentences. There were many cases of candidates using lower case 'i' for the personal pronoun. In addition, many candidates appeared unsure of how to use capital letters for proper nouns. The correct use of apostrophes, especially to indicate possession, was challenging for a number of candidates.

#### 2W4 (Grammar)

On the whole, grammar was used reasonably accurately, only rarely interfering with the communication of meaning. The most common errors amongst less able candidates were a lack of subject/verb agreement, omitting definite and indefinite articles, misuse of conditional tenses and poor syntax.

### **2W5 (Format)**

Very few candidates achieved full marks for format. Although most candidates made a reasonable attempt at formatting a business letter and email, they were less likely to produce an acceptable report, article or leaflet. Even with a letter, candidates mistakenly put their name above their address, which is incorrect, and some omitted their own address completely which meant the letter was not functional. There was a clear pattern emerging of some centres having prepared candidates well when it came to laying out a document correctly.

### **2W6 (Style and Tone)**

Many candidates adopted an acceptable, convincing tone in both tasks. Some candidates wrote in an informal, chatty manner and used colloquialisms where a degree of formality was required. However, there were examples of extremely well-crafted responses which were both convincing and persuasive.

## **Comments on Individual Units**

Centres are expected to prepare candidates thoroughly and use the Functional Skills English Criteria to make candidates aware of the requirements of Level 2 Writing.

Candidates should

- be encouraged to respond with an appropriate level of formality, where appropriate.
- give themselves time for proof-reading and corrections to ensure their spelling, grammar and punctuation are as accurate as possible. In particular, they should be able to use commas and apostrophes (for both omission and possession), accurately at this level.
- be aware of appropriate formats for different types of documents, eg.
  - a report should include a heading, sub-headings, numbered sections (where appropriate) and paragraphs
  - an email should include to, from, subject and date
  - a letter should include sender and recipient addresses, date, salutation and complimentary close.
  - an article should include a heading, strapline, attribution, sub-heading (where appropriate) and paragraphs
  - a leaflet should include a heading, sub-headings, bullet points (where appropriate) and paragraphs
  - be aware, from the scenario given, whether the text requires persuasive, instructional, informative or descriptive writing

## **Sector Update**

Following the Ofqual thematic review of Functional English at Level L2 in the autumn of 2014, OCR carried some minor amendments of Level 2 Writing papers in response to Ofqual comments. These included better presentation of stimulus material and reducing, wherever possible, the amount of reading required in stimulus material.

## Functional Skills English Reading – Level 2

Centres have adapted well to on-demand testing and the system is now working well. The majority of centres administer this qualification very effectively. However there are a few areas where organisation could be made more efficient:

- Additional administration is generated for examination officers and examiners alike when centres enter candidates on Interchange individually or in small batches rather than in a single cohort. Although entering candidates individually or in small batches is not precluded by OCR, entering candidates in a single batch, even if they have not all sat the examination at exactly the same time, helps to ensure the timely issuing of results.
- A few centres do not enter candidates' details on Interchange immediately after the tests have been taken, which can result in delays in marking and the centre being advised of candidates' results. However, most centres are very good at entering candidates' details on Interchange promptly.
- For CBT tests, most centres up-load any CBT tests on the day the test is sat so as to avoid a possible delay in results being issued. However a few delay uploading, which may delay the issue of results. Centres are encouraged to undertake this task as soon as the examination is finished.

Resources and support from OCR seem to be adequate, and most centres are now entering candidates at the correct level and preparing them well for the tests. This is resulting in a higher pass rate.

### General Comments

The vast majority of candidates are able to complete the Reading papers in the time allocated and appear to understand most of the topics and contents of the source documents. Candidates much more frequently misinterpret the actual questions, fail to provide the number of examples or reasons required, or do not realise that they are asked to explain their answer or make recommendations. Some candidates omit questions completely. A few include too much information in the questions they answer first and, as a result, do not have time to answer later questions.

Although the majority of centres enter candidates at the correct level, a few centres appear to enter candidates for Level 2 when they would be more appropriately entered at Level 1.

Most centres prepare their candidates well. However a few candidates still appear to be ill-prepared, and centres are advised to prepare candidates thoroughly, using the Functional English Criteria to make candidates aware of the requirements of Level 2 Reading.

### Comments on Individual Units

2R1 (Select and use different types of texts to obtain and utilise relevant information)

The majority of candidates appear to understand the source documents and are able to select appropriate information and identify the main ideas from them. Most candidates relate well to less formal documents, such as web-based discussion forums, but less so to more formal documents, such as extracts from reports or formal letters. The majority correctly restrict their responses to information and views expressed in the source documents.

2R2 (Read and summarise information/ideas from different sources)

Candidates have difficulty explaining terms used in the source documents, often repeating the words used in the document or giving generic dictionary definitions which do not apply to the context. When asked to provide examples, many draw on personal experience rather than using examples provided in the documents. Most candidates are able to summarise and explain views expressed in the documents, but some find comparing these with views from other documents challenging. More able candidates include a comparison of both differences and similarities in their responses.

2R3 (Identify the purposes of texts and comment on how meaning is conveyed)

Most candidates correctly identify the purposes of the source documents, explaining in sufficient detail, although a few still simply identify the purpose as to 'inform / persuade / instruct', or describe the content or format used. Describing how techniques are used by the author of the documents is, for most candidates, challenging. Many candidates provide a list of techniques without explaining how effective they are. At Level 2, it is not sufficient for candidates to simply identify the features of the text. They must also include specific examples from the source documents and a brief explanation of how these features are used to persuade or convince the reader.

2R4 (Detect point of view, implicit meaning and / or bias)

Candidates often have difficulty with questions about bias, an essential Level 2 skill. Some candidates do not understand the term and are consequently unable to understand fully documents that require them to 'read between the lines'. Others, while understanding the term, are unable to explain why a document may be biased or to explain why an understanding of bias is important.

2R5 (Analyse texts in relation to audience and consider suitable responses)

When asked to give their own opinion on a subject, candidates should ensure that this opinion is based on evidence in the source documents. Many candidates provide considered opinions, using examples from the documents in support. However, many candidates still do not make full use of the necessary documents and end up using their own experience or unrelated views.

In order to increase the likelihood of passing these tests, centres would be advised to instruct their candidates on:

- exam technique and time management, so that they complete the whole test paper within the time allowed.
- interpreting and comparing different kinds of texts, so that they are able to identify the purpose of texts, and consider different techniques employed by writers to engage or persuade audiences
- the key terms they are likely to encounter, so that they become familiar with these terms, for example 'identify' and 'explain', and they can answer questions using these terms
- careful reading of questions so that their response is appropriate and the correct source material is referred to.

## **Sector Update**

In July 2014, the Minister for Skills made it clear that Functional Skills will be extended to remain in Apprenticeships until at least 2020. It was also stated that, from August 2015, the condition of funding will be amended so that students with an existing grade D GCSE will be taught GCSE with others following Functional Skills or other similar qualifications.

Thus, all learners without grade C maths and English must choose Functional Skills or GCSE. From August 2015 those with an existing grade D will do GCSE, and the remainder will take Functional Skills qualifications at the appropriate level.

More recently, the Minister for Skills has announced Functional Skills will be made more “legitimate, valid, respected and admired”. Functional Skills was described as “important” and work with Ofqual would be to improve elements of the qualification, including the branding

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