

**Functional Skills**

**English**

Level 1 – **09498**

**OCR Report to Centres August 2017**

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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.

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## Functional Skills English

Level 1 – **09498** (Unit 1 only)

## OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

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# Functional Skills Level 1 – Writing

## 1 Overview

The Functional Skills English Writing assessment is one of three assessments to be completed by candidates in order to gain the Functional Skills English Qualification at Level 1. The other assessments are for Speaking, Listening & Communication (SLC) and Reading.

The Functional Skills English Writing assessment at Level 1 consists of one 50 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.

The stimulus material and tasks appear to engage candidates. The vast majority of candidates attempt both tasks. There has been little or no change since the last Chief Examiner report was produced in terms of the strengths and weaknesses demonstrated by candidates.

## 2 General Comments

Strengths and weaknesses remain very much the same as in previous years.

Centres are reminded that they need to prepare candidates thoroughly and develop the skills required by the Functional English Standards (coverage and range) when preparing candidates for assessment.

Candidates should:

- be taught to respond appropriately to each task, use their own words, taking note of the scaffolding in the question.
- give themselves time for proof-reading and corrections, ensuring their spelling, grammar and punctuation are accurate. They should be taught techniques to avoid these basic errors. In particular, all centres should teach candidates to use upper case for the personal pronoun and the correct spelling of the word "writing".
- be reminded that if they are word processing responses, or taking the assessment on-screen, 'typos' will be treated as errors and thus it is still important for them to proof read and correct their work.
- be aware of, and use, the appropriate format for different types of document. For example
  - a letter should include sender and recipient addresses, date, salutation and complimentary close.
  - an article should include a heading, strapline, sub-headings where appropriate and paragraphs.
  - an email should include to, from, subject and date.
  - a leaflet should include a heading, sub-headings, bullet points where appropriate and paragraphs.
  - a report should include a heading, sub-headings, numbered sections where appropriate and paragraphs.

- be aware that there are no marks for submitting plans or drafts of documents, or drawings/images. Therefore, candidates should not waste their time including these.

### 3 Comments on Individual Units

#### 1W1 (Content)

The majority of responses are clear and coherent but with varying levels of detail. Most responses follow the suggested content. More able candidates develop ideas effectively, with some writing above the Level 1 standard. A few, weaker, candidates copy text from the task and stimulus material given, without amending it to suit the purpose of the task.

#### 1W2 (Spelling)

Spelling is quite good in the majority of answers with many candidates scoring high marks. However, 'writting' (for 'writing') remains a very common error. Candidates often make errors in spelling words which are present in the task or stimulus material. Errors in the spelling of homophones are common, particularly, "there/their/they're", "witch /which", "hole / whole", "lose/loose", "to/too" and "you're/your". There is also much confusion over the correct use of "of", "off" and "have". Some candidates continue to combine words eg "alot", "aswell", "thankyou", "gonna" and "wonna".

#### 1W3 (Punctuation)

Use of punctuation is variable. Most candidates use capital letters at the beginning of sentences and full stops at the end, although some candidates use commas where they should have ended a sentence. Use of capital letters for proper nouns is less successful and the use of 'i' for 'I' is extensive and is on the increase. There is also the random use of capital letters at the beginning, or in the middle, of words. Question marks are sometimes omitted, not used correctly, or followed by a full stop. A few candidates write their entire response in capital letters, which means that they cannot access full marks for this skill area.

#### 1W4 (Grammar)

On the whole, grammar is used reasonably accurately, only rarely interfering with the communication of meaning. The most common errors are a lack of subject/verb agreement, inconsistency of tense, unusual syntax (word order) and the omission of definite and indefinite articles ('a' and 'the'). There are also many instances of 'should of' or 'could of' and the use of slang terms, inappropriate for formal writing.

#### 1W5 (Format)

Attempts to format the document and accuracy in using the formats required, varies from centre to centre, although the formatting of letters is better than the formatting of other documents e.g. emails, reports, articles and advertisements. There is a clear pattern emerging of centres in which candidates have been well prepared when it comes to laying out a document correctly and other centres, where candidates are unsure how to format documents e.g. formal letters, reports, articles or emails and, in such centres, the majority of candidates score no marks. A few candidates continue to write only the contents of the document without any attempt at formatting it.

#### 1W6 (Structure)

The majority of candidates take note of the scaffolding in the question paper and sequence their responses accordingly. Such candidates are able to produce documents with a beginning, middle and end, although the 'flow' in the middle could sometimes be improved. Occasionally there is an inappropriate tone to the documents, perhaps by being overly familiar. Some documents are extremely brief, which may be due to poor time management.

#### **4 Sector Update**

The review of Functional Skills qualifications continues. Initially, the plan was for the reformed qualifications to be launched in September 2018, but this has now been postponed to September 2019.

A draft Exemplar Curriculum, to support the teaching and assessment of Functional English, has been produced but remains in draft form and will be amended in light of any changes made to the draft subject content.

No final decisions have yet been taken regarding the type of assessments to be produced in relation to the new Functional English Subject Content.

# Functional Skills Level 1 – Reading

## 1 Overview

The majority of candidates attempt all questions for the Reading assessment. The standard of responses is similar across both platforms in which the assessment is offered: paper-based and computer-based.

The qualification is administered well by centres, overall. Most candidates are well prepared for the assessment at this level and candidates are often successful. Unsuccessful candidates are unable to identify and respond to key themes based on information that has been provided.

## 2 General Comments

Most candidates are able to read, understand and effectively engage with the topics and content of the documents provided. Most candidates perform well when answering questions that require a fixed response, whereas, the standard of responses for questions that require explanation and reasoning are more variable. Candidates often employ effective techniques in responding to the assessment, although a few candidates still spend too much time providing detailed responses to less complex questions which leaves insufficient time for more demanding questions that attract higher marks. In a minority of cases, candidates refer to real-life experiences rather than extract information from the texts provided.

Both centres and candidates should be aware that spelling, punctuation, grammar and sentence structure do not form part of this assessment and therefore, candidates should not spend time proof reading for technical accuracy.

## 3 Comments on Individual Units

### **1R1 – Identify the main points and ideas and how they are presented in a variety of texts**

Most candidates are able to identify the main points and ideas in a variety of texts with many candidates able to identify the techniques that have been used to convey information. Less able candidates have difficulty expressing how these techniques help the reader. A small proportion of candidates have difficulty understanding both the questions and source documents.

### **1R2 – Read and understand texts in detail**

The majority of candidates gain a clear understanding of the overall theme and ideas within each of the source documents. In some instances, candidates can provide insufficient detail in their answers. For example, candidates may provide either a general answer that summarises thoughts and themes from both documents, whereas, specific examples from one or either document is what is required. Occasionally, marks have been lost for only providing one valid example when the question requires two examples.

### **1R3 – Use information contained in texts**

Most candidates will base their responses on information provided within the source documents. Some candidates do not use sufficient information meaning their overall response does not fully meet the purpose of the question. In a minority of cases, candidates provide a response based on personal experiences and thoughts regarding the topic without making direct links to the texts that have been provided.

### **1R4 – Identify suitable responses to texts**

Overall, candidates are able to demonstrate they understand the questions asked of them but, in general, responses lack sufficient detail meaning their answer is not functional. Often, candidates state “email them”, “go to the website”, “contact (the relevant person)” or “phone them” and fail to provide the email address, website, telephone number or action that is required to make their response functional. In weaker responses, candidates often give opinions or quote information from the source documents that do not sufficiently address the question.

### **Centre Guidance**

Centres should prepare candidates thoroughly and use the Functional Skills English criteria to adequately prepare candidates for the requirements of Level 1 Reading.

Centres should remind candidates that they should:

- take time to read and understand what each question is asking of them
- plan their time so that more time can be spent on questions with higher marks
- check whether there are two parts to a question and ensure each part of the question has been addressed in their answer
- use appropriate information from the correct resource document and, where required, support their answers with points or examples from the texts provided
- avoid using, at length, personal experiences that are unrelated to the topics addressed in the source documents
- understand that questions about contacting an individual or an organisation for information require the actual contact details that have been provided in the source documents. Stating “call them” or “email them” is not sufficient
- understand that language and layout features are used to convey a message. Candidates should be able to explain the effect of each individual feature / technique identified.

## **4 Sector Update**

The sector continues to monitor the use of Functional Skills as a valid qualification, particularly in Further Education where it is used to support candidates not yet able to take GCSEs. Initially the plan was for the reformed qualifications to be launched in September 2018, but this has now been postponed to September 2019.



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