



Reformed Functional Skills English Senior Examiner's Report February 2020

Overall learner performance

Performance when the qualification was first introduced (September 2019) was very disappointing. Candidates seemed unfamiliar with the Subject Content* and unaware of what would be tested. This has since improved and more recently, candidates appeared to engage well with the topics, tasks and questions set and the vast majority completed the papers.

Areas causing concern for weaker learners

At Level 1 and Level 2, in both Reading and Writing, areas causing concern to weaker candidates are of two distinct types:

- a) exam techniques
- b) problems with skills expected at the level.

a) **Exam techniques**

- Time management. Some weaker candidates did not allow sufficient time across all questions / tasks so that it was clear they rushed the last question / task, or omitted it completely, although the latter was rare
- Reading the question. Some weaker candidates did not read the questions thoroughly and therefore the responses given did not answer the questions, for example:
 - Some Reading questions are in two parts, the first part requiring the candidate to identify something from the text or to give a yes / no response, and the second part requiring them to explain how they know this, or how the writer got the point across. A significant number of candidates gained marks for identification, but then did not make any attempt at explaining and so lost valuable marks. A few

candidates gave an explanation without actually identifying the required information, or responding yes/no

- Some candidates wasted valuable time providing explanations where these were not required by the question
- Using information provided. Some candidates provided answers from their own experience, rather than information provided in the text (for Reading questions) or information given in the scenario (for Writing tasks).

b) Problems with skills expected at the level

- Reading
 - At both levels, candidates struggled with skills which were not required in the legacy qualifications but which are required by the DFE Reformed Functional Skills Subject Content. In particular:
 - Level 1 SOS** 10. Weaker candidates failed to actively compare information, ideas and opinions and instead merely identified / copied out content
 - Level 1 SOS 11. Weaker candidates were not able to distinguish between fact and opinion accurately. Some candidates copied out a series of phrases or sentences from the text, but did not identify what was an opinion and what was a fact
 - Level 1 SOS 14. The majority of candidates were able to identify / name organisational and structural features, but did not then use them to locate relevant information
 - Level 2 SOS 11. Weaker candidates were unable to identify when main points are sufficient and when it is important to have specific details
 - Level 2 SOS 12. As at Level 1, weaker candidates failed to actively compare information, ideas and opinions and instead merely identified / copied out content. Often candidates who did compare information, ideas and opinions were not able to compare how these were conveyed
 - Level 2 SOS 14. Although most candidates were able to understand the relationship between textual features and devices, they did not understand how these could be used to shape meaning for a different audience / purpose
 - Level 2 SOS 16. As at Level 1, candidates were able to identify organisational features, but did not then use them to locate relevant information
 - Level 2 SOS 19. Many candidates seemed to have no idea what was meant by style and writer's voice. When responding to questions about style, weaker candidates identified what the document was, or what it was about, rather than identifying the style in which it had been written

- As with the legacy qualifications, weaker candidates did not understand bias (SOS 17) and were unable to identify which document was least, or most biased and were unable to explain the level of formality and / or bias.
- Writing
 - Spelling, punctuation and grammar
 - At both levels the lack of accuracy was a major issue. Frequent problems included errors in:
 - Level 1 SOS 21 / Level 2 SOS 22 spelling, including words used in the scenario and tasks
 - Level 1 SOS 19 / Level 2 SOS 20 punctuation, in particular an inability to separate sentences, to use commas for lists, or parenthesis and the widespread use of ‘i’ for the personal pronoun
 - Level 1 SOS 20 / Level 2 SOS 21 grammar, including the omission of definite (the) and indefinite (a / an) articles, as well as issues with subject / verb agreement and correct / consistent use of tense.
 - Writing composition
 - At both levels the following areas of the Subject Content caused problems for weaker candidates
 - Level 1 SOS 23 / Level 2 SOS 24 – length. Weaker candidates did not write at an appropriate level of detail or length (including where this was specified in the task). Such responses were short (or very short) and therefore did not fully cover what was required by the task
 - Level 1 SOS 24 / Level 2 SOS 25 – format. A few candidates either did not attempt to format their response at all, or they used minimal formatting which would not be functional eg they included a heading, but no sub-headings or numbered sections or paragraphs in a report
 - Level 1 SOS 25 / Level 2 SOS 28 – complex sentences and paragraphs. Weaker candidates wrote documents without any use of paragraphs, or used single sentence paragraphs inappropriately throughout.

Advice for centres

Ensure candidates are prepared thoroughly for the Functional Skills assessments, both in terms of exam techniques and skills required.

With regard to exam technique, candidates should be taught to:

- read questions carefully and respond to what is asked, taking note of key process words such as identify, explain and compare

- manage their time effectively, answering all questions. Candidates should be reminded that questions may well have more than one part, and it is advisable to re-read the question after answering it to check it has been fully answered
- leave time to check through their responses and in Writing to proof read and correct what they have written.

With regard to Reading tests, candidates should be taught and reminded of:

- the need to answer questions in sufficient detail
- the need to be familiar with a range of techniques (language and layout) used by writers and be prepared to identify them, giving examples where requested
- at Level 2, the need to understand bias, formality and style and to be able to compare how ideas and opinions are conveyed across different texts
- the need to carefully read the question and take note of key process words, such as *identify, explain, compare*.

With regard to Writing tests, candidates should be taught and reminded of:

- the need for accuracy. Responses should be proof read and corrected, ensuring accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar
- the need to format correctly the documents produced, for example:
 - Letters should include sender and recipient addresses, date, salutation and matching close. It is incorrect to put the sender's name above their address
 - Emails should include details of to, from, date and subject
 - Reports should include headings, sub-headings and where appropriate other features eg numbering, paragraphing
 - Articles should include heading, sub-heading(s), strapline, attribution, paragraphs (as appropriate)
 - Advertisements / leaflets should include heading, sub-heading(s), paragraphs, other features eg bullet points as appropriate. Candidates should also be reminded that even when writing advertisements or leaflets, they should write in full sentences and check the accuracy of their spelling, punctuation and grammar. They should also include sufficient content to cover what is required by the question
- the need to ensure the document produced is fit for purpose in terms of its length and that it is functional in terms of the subject, purpose and audience. In particular, formal language (not text speak or colloquial language) should be used in formal communications.

Centres are reminded that there is no compensation for candidates for whom English is not their first language and that 'typos' are errors. The same standard of accuracy is expected from all candidates irrespective of their background, or the medium through which they are taking the test (ie on-screen or paper-based).

Finally, it is important that if candidates are to succeed in their assessments, they should be fully aware of the requirements of the DFE Subject Content* and confident / competent in the skills required at the relevant level, prior to being entered for the test.

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* Department for Education. Subject Content functional skills

** Scope of Study (pgs 13 – 16 of the Subject Content)

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