FUNCTIONAL SKILLS
ENGLISH

CE REPORT

July 2016
Introduction

The purpose of this feedback report is to provide information to centres on candidate performance and to give advice on areas which need further development and improvement.

It should be read in conjunction with the Functional English Standards at Level 1 and level 2 (which are underpinned by the Adult Literacy Standards).

Overall Performance

Overall, performance has remained the same as previously reported, although there has been some improvement in the formatting / layout of documents (e.g., letters, reports, articles, and emails).

The majority of candidates performed well at both Level 1 and Level 2 in Reading and Writing, so pass rates have continued to be relatively high pass. Candidates appeared to engage well with the topics, tasks, and questions set and the vast majority completed the papers.
Areas Causing concern for weaker candidates

At Level 1 and Level 2, in both Reading and Writing, areas causing concern for weaker candidates relate to two separate issues

a) exam technique

b) skills expected at the level.

a) Exam technique

- **Time management**
  - Some candidates did not allow sufficient time across all questions / tasks resulting in them rushing the last question / task or omitting it completely.

- **Reading the question**
  - Some candidates did not read the questions thoroughly and therefore the responses given did not answer the questions set.
  - 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 which were not required by the question.

- **Using information provided**
  - Some candidates gave answers based on their own experience or prior knowledge, rather than on information provided in the text (for Reading questions) or information given in the scenario (for Writing tasks).

b) Skills

- **Reading**
  - At both Level 1 and Level 2 some candidates struggled to provide sufficient detail or explanation in their responses. For example, at Level 1 where a question asks for details of how to contact an organisation or where further information can be found, it is not functional to provide a generic response eg ‘by email’, ‘ring them’, ‘look on the web’. Actual details should be provided eg of the specific email address, phone number or web address.
  - At both Level 1 and Level 2, candidates were able to identify the main points and ideas accurately, but knowledge of language / layout features and identification of the techniques used, either of language (eg emotive language) or layout (eg use of bold / numbered points etc) was weaker. Identification of purpose remained weak.
At Level 2, some candidates found it difficult to compare ideas or opinions across texts. Many produced superficial answers in which comparison was implicit (e.g., by juxtaposing related ideas), rather than explicit.

At Level 2, weaker candidates found it difficult to identify purpose. Weaker candidates often focused on content e.g., ‘The article is about mobile phones’ or gave single word answers e.g., ‘descriptive’, instead of being specific e.g., ‘The purpose of this article is to inform readers about the dangers of very young children using mobile phones’.

At Level 2, some candidates did not perform well in relation to analysing texts for bias (or examples of bias). While being able to understand the explicit meaning of the texts, they were unable to identify underlying or implicit meaning or bias.

**Writing**

- At both Level 1 and Level 2, accuracy (or rather the lack of it) continues to be a major issue. Problems are identical to those reported previously and include errors in:
  - spelling, including words used in the scenario and tasks
  - punctuation, in particular an inability to separate sentences and the widespread use of ‘i’ for the personal pronoun
  - grammar, including the omission of definite (the) and indefinite (a / an) articles, as well as issues with syntax (word order) and tense.

**Other areas causing concern for some candidates included**

- a lack of detail – in particular at Level 2. Candidates now have to write only two documents and more time is allowed. However, some responses still lack detail and/or clarity.

- a lack of formatting. Some candidates either did not attempt to format their response or they used minimal formatting which would not be functional e.g., they included a heading but no sub-headings or numbered sections or paragraphs in a report. When asked to produce a leaflet, some candidates produced a poster or an advertisement. This resulted in marks for content, punctuation and grammar being lost as the document lacked detail and complete sentences were not used.

- a lack of paragraphing. Some candidates wrote documents without any paragraphs or used single sentence paragraphs inappropriately throughout a document.

- over-use of bullet points or lists leading to a lack of evidence of competence in grammar and/or punctuation.
Advice for centres

Advice remains the same as given previously. Candidates should be prepared thoroughly for the Functional English assessments, both in terms of exam technique and skills required.

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. Candidates should leave time to check through their responses and in Writing to proof read and correct what they have written.

Reading. Candidates should be taught to

- answer questions in sufficient detail.
- 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, understand bias, purpose and to be able to compare ideas and opinions across texts
- read carefully the questions set and follow key instructions, such as identify, explain, compare.

Writing. Candidates should be taught to

- write accurately. Responses should be proof read and corrected, ensuring accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Centres are reminded that there is no compensation for candidates for whom English is not their first language; the same standard of accuracy is expected from all candidates ie that which is stated in the coverage and range of the Functional English Standards for each level.
- format (ie layout) 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.
- Make sure that the document produced is fit for purpose and 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.
Finally, it is important that if candidates are to succeed in their assessments, they should be confident and competent in the skills required at the level before they are entered for the test.

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