
FUNCTIONAL SKILLS ENGLISH

Level 1

Report on the Examination

4720

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Component 1 Reading

This report covers both the OnScreen and the paper versions of this test.

The theme of this series was crime and the police and once again, candidates found the source texts appealing and interesting.

Question 5: There were no issues with the multiple choice questions, between 65 and 91% correct answers across the 6 questions. One plea from the Principal Examiner relates to those students who use a computer to answer these questions. Some such candidates choose to type out the entire answer, which is deeply unhelpful to the examiner. Could centres please ensure that only the letter A, B, C or D, relating to the chosen option is given by the candidate rather than the entire answer.

Question 7: The first part of this question required candidates to identify four qualities someone needs to be a good police officer. The majority of candidates achieved well, almost 65% gaining full marks. The main reason for underachievement here lay in a misunderstanding of what was meant by “qualities”. 7b, where four pieces of information about the pay and conditions were required, was somewhat less successful with 31% gaining full marks but a further 58% achieved 3 marks, meaning that performance o Q7 overall was very pleasing.

Question 8: Achievement on this question has remained in line with that in November – almost 40% gaining full marks and 10% achieving no marks. However, the advice from the November report remains relevant and bears repeating here. Some candidates get the marks almost by accident by citing several features and offering generic explanations as to why these make the article easier to understand. Training candidates to offer, in each part of the question, **one** presentational feature with an explanation relating to **that** feature would improve performance further and would be very welcome. However, it is a delight to see any progress and teachers are to be commended for working so hard to help their students access the demands of this question.

Overall, this was clearly an accessible and enjoyable paper to which candidates responded well and thus performed well.

The Level 1 test is a good preparation for moving on to Level 2 and thence to GCSE and the reading skills which students develop through these tests will stand them in good stead in their everyday and working lives. Overall, it is clear that those working with Level 1 candidates are doing a fine job of preparing their students for the demands of this test and they are to be commended for their success in doing so.

Component 2 Writing

There is every reason to remain confident of the value of this qualification. It is consistent in its standard as a test of basic English writing skills and is the basis for secure progression.

With two questions containing stimulus material leading into a task which is supported by bullet points, candidates are able to use some of the information in the question. There is an element of problem solving and functional thinking in completing the task. At this level, centres now very rarely enter candidates who have little or no chance of getting inside Band 2 Mark Scheme descriptors. Candidates seemed generally confident and able to meet the requirements of the questions with an overwhelming majority of candidates on both Question 1 and Question 2 hitting at least 4 marks for content. It is the view of examiners that a majority of candidates in this series, at the top end of the distribution with total marks of 15 or more, would be well suited to the demands of Level 2 and should be encouraged to progress. Candidates whose marks fall below a total of 15 may well need a little more in the way of skill development before they progress on to Level 2. Close examination of the centre's mark profile would be very useful in establishing appropriate progression routes for candidates.

Question 1: This question asked candidates to write a letter to Andrew Hollings in support of an application to work for Community Action, a local environmental organisation. The stimulus material provided some background on the group by referring to projects that the group had delivered. The question asked candidates to say something about themselves and why they would want to apply.

Most candidates were clearly aware of the need to produce an effective application that conveyed key information within a standard letter format. The best letters incorporated the structure that was inherent in the bullet points. Candidates wrote openly about why they wished to volunteer or undertake paid work. Volunteering was more popular and many candidates put forward the case that the kind of tasks that Community Action pursued were the responsibility of the community at large and should not need to be paid for. Those who opted for paid employment often cited the need to draw an income in order to raise a family and to establish an employment record. In the area of skills and talents, candidates often put forward their capacity to work with others, to take responsibility and to provide leadership. Fewer candidates presented specific skills in terms of physical capacity but those who did tended to focus on cleaning and gardening skills.

Many strong answers approached the third bullet point ('why you are interested in Community Action') by talking about the need to improve our world by direct community involvement. Others made suggestions about the kind of projects that could be taken on in future, such as building programmes, although the ambition displayed was sometimes quite unrealistic. A high proportion of good answers concentrated on the reference in the stimulus material to a 'dog trail' and expressed their commitment to working with animals.

These good answers were well structured and the use of paragraphs often mirrored the bullet points explicitly to provide a three part structure. Sentences were able to carry information

effectively and in many cases, were very enthusiastic with some element of persuasion, indicating that the candidates were ready for progression to Level 2.

Weaker candidates struggled to establish a sense of function despite the fact that the task was recognised and the topic evident. Candidates often attempted to provide information rather than actually providing it and clarity of expression was consistently lacking. Weaker answers also failed to provide a sense of an autonomous writer and large sections of the stimulus material were often transcribed. It is important, however, to be aware that the percentage of answers in Band 1 for both content and accuracy was very small.

Finally on this question a brief note about letter form. Nearly all candidates were able to lay down some elements of letter form, usually the greeting, although many deviated from the standard formal 'Dear Mr Hollings' or 'Dear Andrew' into such expressions as 'Hi Andy'. Whilst the sense of audience is clearly evident in such responses, the expected formality is not and this might reduce the impact of the letter. More serious is the failure to provide a sender's address although the address to whom the letter is sent may well be present. Without the sender's address, there is no possibility of a reply and therefore the letter's functionality is seriously affected. The mark scheme takes this into account and candidates who do not provide 'some elements' of letter form are unlikely to get into the top band.

Question 2: For this question, candidates were asked to send an email to Mishal at Veg2urtable, an online fruit and vegetable supplier who deliver locally. Candidates were provided with stimulus material that included a list of claims that Veg2urtable made about the company and the service it offers. Candidates were asked to report an unsatisfactory experience to Mishal.

Candidates performed less well on this question than on Question 1 although not as quite as much on the content side as accuracy (see below). This is probably a time issue; with two questions to be answered in 45 minutes, candidates need to ensure they follow the advice on the front of the exam paper and 'spend about half your time' on each question.

Nevertheless, there were many good answers. The best of these tended to take one or two of the claims made in the Veg2urtable publicity and to focus their complaint on the chosen points. So, if the candidate addressed 'Fresh every day' by describing the poor or rotting quality of the produce delivered, they did so in some detail. They listed the products they had ordered and described the problems that they encountered. Fruit that was bruised and smelly was, not surprisingly, given prominence, while a number of candidates wrote about sell-by dates. Another area that encouraged some interesting narrative accounts was the 'Friendly staff' claim. Many candidates described produce being flung down outside the house or thrown at them, whilst in one case a delivery man entered the house without permission. Rudeness was also often a feature of this aspect.

Candidates who provided detail as above were generally able to meet the following descriptors - 'some relevant details of vegetables/ delivery'; 'information is selected for purpose' - and get a Band 3 mark of 5 or 6. The crucial issues are relevance and selection for purpose.

Weaker candidates were unable to produce the detail required and tended to produce statements of a general nature such as 'the vegetables were late' or 'I was not happy' both of which could be easily generated from the wording within the question itself. Such answers tended to find themselves in Band 2 with a mark of 3 or 4 for content. The weakest answers in Band 1 offered very little that was clearly expressed enough to merit reward. These responses, which gained 1 or 2 marks for content are nevertheless very rare.

Accuracy

It was worrying to see a significant drop in the level of accuracy between Question 1 and 2. There were too many candidates in Band 1, Whilst this is probably a function of lack of time, and perhaps under such pressure the monitoring of accuracy is forgotten, candidates should be made aware that dropping a mark for accuracy could be hugely significant and it is more important to write a shorter amount clearly than to write a lot which is full of error.

The most important descriptor for Band 2 achievement is 'meaning is clear' and in this series the vast majority of candidates reached this band.

Band 2 nevertheless represents a modest level of achievement with written Standard English. Candidates in this band would typically provide some grammatical sentences, syntax would be largely appropriate for Standard English and the spelling of common words would be mostly accurate. When these are not present, the candidate's work will fall into Band 1 for accuracy.

The construction of grammatical sentences with clear full stops and capital letters remains elusive. Some examiners also noted an inconsistency in the use of upper case with weaker candidates displaying hit and miss approach. Some candidates made errors such as omitting words which could have been self-corrected through proof-reading.

Spelling was generally of a good standard although weaker candidates resorted to phonetic transcriptions of more difficult words.

I would also like to emphasise the importance of checking writing. This is particularly significant for those candidates taking on-screen assessments or providing word-processed answers. Also, when candidates produce very short answers, with unchecked typos dominating the reader's experience, it is highly unlikely that the candidate would score well for either content or accuracy.

One examiner commented:

Most were awarded a mark in band 2 for accuracy. There were clear responses and often candidates made a few mistakes.

They are still mixing up 'our' and 'are' and I saw more 'yous' this time (probably dialect)

Failure with agreement: 'You was...'

Some Americanisms such as 'gonna' and American spelling such as 'moldy' .

Other spelling errors: 'frit' (fruit); 'vegtbles', 'deliverd', 'squished', 'because'; 'bilities'

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.

Converting Marks into UMS marks

Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.

UMS conversion calculator www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion