
FUNCTIONAL SKILLS ENGLISH LEVEL 2

8725/S/W/R

Report on the Examination

8725

June 2022

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Please note that this report covers Functional Skills English for Level 2 (8725)**8725/S – Speaking****Introduction**

A large number of centres entered this round of submissions. For some centres it was straightforward to verify their work. They had assimilated the standard by looking at the AQA standardising materials and they had completed the necessary record forms accurately.

The best submissions came from centres where students had chosen their own topic to present, and where their teachers asked them searching questions to allow them to show their skills. It is important to note here that teachers need to ask questions because they know the criteria and what the student needs to do to attain them. This is especially necessary on Level 2 (8725). On this higher level qualification, as seen in the standardising videos, students must talk at length, both in their presentation and when answering questions.

Each submission gives an insight into what is engaging students at any one time. This is especially the case with the very large June entry. A year ago it was all things covid, this year covid was barely a topic to mention. Easily the most popular topic for students to talk about was the war in Ukraine and it was pleasing to note that students were well informed and had researched key aspects of their ideas. They showed genuine sympathy for the plight of those caught up in the conflict and were led by some very good English teaching into thinking about how their own lives could be impacted by economic and social consequences of the conflict.

Problems remain in five key areas, as has noted in all previous reports. The first is that too many students read their presentation, without any attempt to engage with their audience. If this is the case then teachers should take the opportunity to teach aspects of presenting, showing students how they can use a script but at the same time engage with their audience. Too often it seemed that students were being put in front of a camera without preparation and then given their one and only chance to perform.

The second problem area is the completion of paperwork for the submission. A centre declaration sheet (CDS) must be sent with the submission. Each student in the sample must have a centre record form (CRF), and for each student all criteria must be indicated to have been achieved.

The third problem is that many centres do not submit evidence by the required deadline. Students should only be entered for this examination if there is already evidence that they have passed. It is not acceptable to start thinking about the required evidence after entries have been submitted.

The fourth problem is that many centres seem to think that Functional Skills English is a default qualification for those unable, for various reasons, to sit GCSE. This is not necessarily the case, especially with Spoken English: whereas at GCSE Spoken English is an endorsement and so an add-on, at Functional Skills it is a requirement. Quite a number of centres opt for Functional Skills and then expect their students to be able to ignore all/some of the key requirements of the Spoken English unit. This causes great difficulties.

The fifth problem is the failure to label each file on the USB with the centre number, student number, student name. Centres who use their own systems, or merely put initials of students, make it very hard for the verifier to match the file with the online entry.

Please note that video submissions on DVD can no longer be accepted. A USB must be used.

If a password is required then it must be the AQA supplied password for the sitting. Centres must not use their own passwords which are then unavailable to the verifier.

The nature of the component

The spoken component is an integral part of the Functional Skills package called English. Along with Reading and Writing it is a required element, and the subject as a whole cannot be passed without it. As part of the component there are two activities that must be completed. These involve giving a presentation and taking part in discussions. These involve giving a presentation and taking part in a discussion. If both tasks are not completed and if no evidence is provided, a pass cannot be awarded to the student.

For a presentation there must be a recording, plus a completion of the presentation part of the record form. For a discussion there must be a completion of the discussion part of the record form.

Each of the activities has a sub set of skills that must be delivered for a pass. These are listed on the record form, and all of them must be achieved. This is called a mastery model of assessment, so even one cross in the 'no' column means that the student has not passed and should be entered at a later date. For example, if a student is not asked any questions after their presentation, or does not answer them, then they cannot be awarded a pass.

In advance of submission of entry and grades

1. During the Functional English course students should regularly take part in presentations with questions and in discussions. The questions should, at least in part, be from teachers/adults and should be designed to ensure that students can reach the required criteria. There is guidance in section 5 of the specification.

2. When preparing for/practising presentations, students must be discouraged from reading verbatim notes or PowerPoints. Students should be speaking on a suitable topic of their own choice.

3. Teachers should collect evidence which will be a video recording of a presentation for each student in the sample to be submitted and notes on the discussions to be entered on the AQA Candidate Record Form (CRF)

If there are reasons that make it impossible to conduct visual recordings then exemptions must be sought from AQA well in advance of the submission deadline.

4. When students are entered the centre must already have collected the evidence that will allow them to give the student a Pass. This means they must have fulfilled **all** the criteria for both presenting and discussing. To ensure that you are familiar with the required standards (which for 8725 are obviously higher than for 8720) please watch the AQA standardisation videos, which are available via the AQA website. Please **do not** enter students if you do not have the required evidence to do so.

5. To summarise: *The procedure is: collect the evidence; complete the paperwork; check that all standards have been met by looking at criteria and watching standardisation videos; enter the student; wait to forward the evidence to the verifier.*

A check list of what is required once you are asked to submit your evidence for verification.

- Check that you are submitting the required sample size, that each student's presentation is on a separate clearly labelled file on a USB and that 8720 are separated from 8725.
- Check that the files play on Windows Media Player, on a computer. Check that visuals can be seen and that sound can be heard.
- Do not compress files and crucially do not encrypt with passwords known only to you. AQA does not require encryption. If you do, then please use the official password supplied by AQA.
- Check that you have completed and forwarded a CDS and a CRF form for each student in the sample. Double check that every student you have entered as Pass is shown to have fulfilled all the criteria on the CRFs.
- Have all materials ready for verification by the deadline.
- When notified of your verifier the sample should be posted to the verifier using first class post (fully paid) and without the need for a signature. It is helpful if the centre submits a short piece of correspondence to the verifier, making it clear what centre is sending the materials, its number, and which specification is being entered. Do not use Special/Signed for Delivery.

Conclusion

The very best talks are those where students talk about often unusual and very challenging experiences, which are then teased out for their implications by subtle and sensitive questioning.

Many teachers have again worked very hard to provide verifiers with all that is needed and their efforts are much appreciated.

[AQA | Notes and guidance: non exam assessment \(NEA\)](#)

Centre Declaration Sheet 2022 - https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/admin/crf_pdf/AQA-CDS-22.PDF

[Functional Skills English Specification for first teaching in 2019 \(aqa.org.uk\)](#)

8725/W – Writing

Overview

This is the tenth series under the reformed Functional Skills in English specification, Level 2 Writing (8725W). Although there is still some disruption to education due to the Coronavirus pandemic it would appear that the trend is now more positive in terms of entries and this summer series confirmed this.

The 2011 standards have now been superseded by 'scope of study' descriptors which apply to Writing Composition and Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar (SPG). These can now be found on pages 9 and 10 of the AQA Specification

<https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/resources/english/specifications/AQA-8720-8725-SP-2019.PDF> .

At Level 2 learners are required to produce straightforward and complex texts such as articles, narratives, explanations and reports of varying lengths. Each writing task will require learners to address one of the above categories although it is important to note that narratives and explanations can be embedded within different formats such as emails, blogs, letters, reviews etc

The reformed qualification is intended to maintain very high standards and the examination provides a rigorous and fair test of writing skills for students. It is expected to establish itself as a strong currency in regards to educational progression and employment and for some students this qualification may be the only formal English qualification of value that they have achieved.

To ensure continuity under the reformed specification the writing papers have retained two questions. Each contains stimulus material leading into a task, enabling students to use some of the information in the question. There is an element of problem solving and functional thinking in completing each task. A significant innovation is that there are word limits established for Question 1, which will have an impact on the achievement of students and this is looked at in more detail below. The time allocated for the paper is now 1 hour with an advisory 20 minutes for the 1st question. The total mark available for the paper has been maintained at 30, with 9 marks for Question 1 (6 for composition, 3 for SPG) and 21 marks for Question 2 (12 for composition, 9 for SPG). SPG comprises 40% of total marks, the same ratio as under the previous specification. The imbalance in the value of the questions has led to developments in the mark scheme, with a four level scheme applying to the writing composition element of Question 2, worth 12 marks. Mark schemes for both questions are now skill based and will remain unchanged for the lifetime of the specification and can be found at: <https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/resources/english/AQA-87202-SMS.PDF>

This examination is an excellent preparation for the GCSE English Language Unit 2 with its focus on non-fiction. It is also important to note that in the context of recent reform, where re-sit GCSE may not be an option for students, the need to achieve a creditable qualification in English is paramount for some students and this is where the Level 2 qualification will have a significant role to play. Functional English at this level could be seen as the apex of a clear alternative progression route after Level 1, with Entry Level Certificate (Step Up to English) at its base.

Centres are now confidently entering students who are well able to meet the demands of the Level 2 paper but there are many who still need to practice their basic writing skills, particularly in terms of SPaG. In this series, some 17% of students achieved total marks of 15 or fewer, which is a significant improvement on the March series. The panel of examiners felt that performance below 15 marks reflected an inability to write fluently and confidently, particularly in regards to sentence construction and punctuation, although the content was sometimes appropriate. However, there

were a number of students entered who would have benefited from a Level 1 assessment, running at approximately 5% (who achieve marks in total of 10 or fewer).

The standard of this examination is maintained through rigorous marking and awarding procedures. The determination at AQA to ensure the quality of the examination means that students entered for this examination should be aware of, and prepared for, the demands of a very challenging assessment.

Question 1

This question asked students to write a letter to Shan Sumira, a representative of a local college, to notify her that it would not be possible to attend an arranged interview for a part time post at Bramby Logistics. Although the date and time of the interview was included in the stimulus material, the question was phrased in an open way to allow a range of reasons for non-attendance. The stimulus material provided additional information that could also be incorporated into the answer. At standardising, it became apparent that some students had sent emails to apologise for non-attendance on a date that had already passed. This was not penalised as it was accepted as a valid response as long as the student provided a clear response to the task.

Most students had little difficulty in providing some relevant content for this question and there was an impressive array of answers that ranged from highly informed to simple intuitive responses. Only a very small minority were unable to grasp the requirements of the question. However, at standardising, it was apparent that a number of answers that were perfectly sound in terms of content, were at or below the word limit for the question. The panel therefore took the view that it would not be fair to penalise such answers and it was felt that the mark scheme would provide ample tools to differentiate the quality of answers. It is interesting to note, and it may be a function of the fact that so many answers were at (or below) the minimum length, that some 2/3 of the answers received marks of 3 or 4 for composition.

Most answers established a clear pattern of response that included the following elements: an apology, the reason for non-attendance, the need to re-schedule the interview.

The best answers included all of the above elements. Apologies were clear without being fulsome or inappropriate. The clarity of expression at this stage established the tone for the rest of the letter. The reasons for non-attendance were often introduced within a family context and many writers explained that they had family functions on that date that they could not avoid. One or two students expressed the view that although the job at Bramby Logistics was a top priority they hoped the company would understand their decision not to attend. This established a link of trust between the writer and reader was an effective device. Many other reasons took the form of pre-arranged appointments with a doctor or dentist and there was a wide range of other, perfectly valid reasons. Where the reasons stretched credibility it was unlikely that the student would gain maximum marks.

It was felt that brief answers which did not ask for a re-scheduling could not get into the top band (see above) and while most strong answers did so, some failed to do so and slipped down. Many of the better ones wrote about their burning desire to work at the Crossfield Warehouse and pleaded for another chance to set out their credentials at interview. Again, this showed initiative and was effective.

Answers in the middle band for content, gaining marks of 3 or 4, tended to be effective and direct, with clear details provided but lacking in one or more elements as outlined above. Whilst quite solid answers, their effectiveness was often limited by baldly stating that they would not be coming to the interview, or producing a reason that would undermine the validity of the letter..

Only 7.5% of students fell into the lowest level (1-2 marks) for writing composition. This is a minority of students, and an improvement on the March series. Achievement of this sort marks the student as not ready for Level 2. It was apparent to the panel that a considerable proportion of answers at this level were very brief, struggling to meet the lower word limits for the question. In many cases the student was unable to address the topic in any meaningful way with some simply describing the pictures within the stimulus material in the barest of ways.

Please note that as Question 1 is worth a maximum of only 9 marks (including SPaG), students who spend too long on this question are putting themselves at a disadvantage. They are losing time on Question 2 which is worth 21 marks. In relation to the issue of word length, examiners felt that some 30% of answers were below the lower limit. In many cases, the shortfall was marginal and there was no penalty attached. However, in some cases, the shortfall was too evident to ignore and this was taken into account in the marking of the composition element. It was also felt that a number of answers in the middle band were too long, which would impact on the time available for students to answer Question 2.

Question 2

This question asked students to write an article about alternatives to mobile phone usage to upload to itsawhirl.co.uk. The writing of articles is one of the four categories for English Writing under the current regulations for Functional Skills and most students seemed to know how to approach the task in terms of tone, style and content.

Nearly all students were able to provide answers that covered the territory well with 48% or so reaching a mark of 8 or more for the content (out of a maximum of 12). This was an encouraging result and a significant improvement on the March series. One examiner said of the students in the middle bands (4-6, 7-9): 'There were many responses which gave the history of mobile phones alongside dire warnings of the dangers of social media with its cyberbullying and fat-shaming; but little if anything in the way of alternatives.'

At the highest level (marks 10-12) students established the context of mobile phone use by presenting its history and its quite frightening hold on young people. Some cleverly talked of a 'pandemic' and wittily played Covid against mobile phone use. After this introduction, the best answers moved on to talk about alternatives to the ubiquitous presence of the mobile phone. Many strong answers were able to write very effectively of the benefits of reading books and getting away from screens. The point was well-made that it was not reading that was being put forward as the alternative but a different source of reading: sustained texts and not bite-sized chunks of text from social media. Students wrote of the satisfaction of reading novels and novel series citing examples such as J K Rowling, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens and Terry Pratchett. One or two students talked about how enlightening it was to read history books.

Another key theme in the better answers was the need to swap interior and screen based activity for external, physical activity and good cases were made for a variety of activities, sport being perhaps the most obvious. However, good answers also put forward the case for the spiritual and emotional benefits of a walk in the countryside or a cycle ride. Hobbies such as art and crafts, cookery, clothes design and tailoring were also put forward for the way they could enhance young people's lives.

The final category of alternatives focused on relationships by stressing the benefits of engaging collaboratively in activities such as watching films, listening to music, sharing meals and contributing to family life.

The use of appropriate vocabulary to enhance specific detail was a key factor in taking responses in the top level. For instance, in one strong response the student asked 'why not submerge yourself into a different world by opening that first page...' In other answers, a tone of encouragement was introduced into the account to consolidate the case: 'Strengthen those bonds by hanging out with friends and get off that phone'.

At the top level students used an appropriately effective range of sentences, varying length and complexity. A good example would be: 'Feeling alive and exercising has been proven to lower feelings of depression, and has many more side effects than texting.' The use of the passive voice and dual subject shows a grasp of sentence structure at an impressive level.

Strong answers were very well structured and an example of the paragraph structure of one is as follows:

1. Initial context, humorous depiction of the threat of mobile phones ('pandemic')
2. First alternative: reading books
3. Second alternative: exercise
4. Third alternative: 'hang out with friends'
5. Brief conclusion with upbeat final sentence.

Responses in the upper middle level of achievement (6-9) marks were adequate for purpose and audience with clear analyses of the dangers of mobile phones. There was a considerable interest in mental health in such answers. Most answers in this band reflected a thorough approach to the task without any effective writing technique. It was felt that a number of answers in this band would have been lifted by some engagement with telling detail or exploration of the preferred alternatives.

In the 4-6 level, students tended to produce weaker answers for the following reasons: lack of depth in the writing, reflecting a lack of thought in planning; weak sentence structure, often lacking control of demarcation or subordinate clauses; brevity in the response; failure to meet the purpose in writing an account to be sent to the company. A number of answers in this band also failed to appreciate the nature of the task in terms of purpose and audience, focusing too strongly on the threats of mobile phones for young people without addressing alternatives to use.

Answers in the bottom band were confined to approximately 5.5% of the cohort which was significantly better performance than on Question 1. Answers at this level were marked by serious deficits in terms of skill in expression as well as the ability to produce any kind of satisfactory structure. Students achieving marks in this content band would be better sitting the Level 1 exam.

As in March, a higher percentage of students did not produce an answer for this question than Question 1. It is likely that this was caused by time management issues.

SPaG

The headline statements are:

- Top level: Quality of SPaG supports clear meaning
- Middle level: SPaG does not detract substantially from the general meaning being conveyed.
- Lowest level: SPaG errors detract from meaning.

One examiner wrote, 'SPaG continued to show a little improvement as we saw in January. Sentence punctuation is a little more in line with convention and the use of other punctuation is

often quite accurate. Similarly with spelling where the spelling of more specialist words was again often more in line with convention..’

Spelling: at the top level students used specialist language effectively to deliver clarity. Words such as, ‘specified’, ‘unfortunate’, ‘funeral’ and ‘responsibility’ in Question 1 were spelt correctly. In Question 2 words and phrases such as ‘pandemic’, ‘mindlessly scrolling’, ‘captions’, ‘memories’, ‘feelings of depression’ were spelt correctly. When ascribing a level to spelling it is not simply the correctness of the spelling that matters but the range and ambition of the vocabulary. At the bottom level, ‘a few examples of conventional spelling’ is a key descriptor in the mark scheme.

Punctuation: sentence demarcation is the most significant issue in punctuation and answers in the top level displayed accuracy throughout. In this series, there was evidence that students were using more ambitious punctuation, such as semi-colons (see above). In the middle level, sentence punctuation is accurate when sentences are straightforward. Students in the lowest band often display only threshold skills in the use of punctuation, in many cases omitting it altogether.

Grammar: At the bottom level a range of grammatical errors are found which makes reading very difficult. Some emerging features in this series:

- Inconsistent use of tense and auxiliary verbs as in ‘I writing this because...’, ‘I have already work there...’
- subject/verb agreement as in ‘Sports tournaments is...’
- incorrect forms such as ‘they got treadmills’
- misuse of articles
- misuse of conjunctions
- over-long sentences that lose grammatical cohesion

The final mark for spelling, punctuation and grammar takes into account achievement and variation across the three elements.

The bottom level of achievement for SPaG would generally place the student well outside of the possibility of gaining a pass, although this is very much a minority of those taking the examination. Students who do achieve marks in this band would need to strengthen their skill base if they were to re-take the examination. In this series, for Question 1 about 13% were in the bottom level, while for Question 2 there were 15% at that level which compare favourably with the March series.

8725/R – Reading

The topic for the summer series was aquatic creatures / fish. Source A was an uncompromising article about the problems with the catching and breeding of fish for aesthetic purposes, focusing on cruelty and unethical treatment. In contrast, Source B was a podcast about keeping pet fish and Source C an advertisement promoting Sea Life Centre. There was a very high level of engagement with the materials, with some particularly strong reactions to the issues raised by Source A. It was apparent that many students had personal knowledge and experience of keeping fish and these were not always helpful when they distracted from focus on the given texts.

Question 1 was a very straightforward retrieval task requiring identification of the name of the poison used in the catching of tropical fish, and enjoyed a success rate of over 90%. The high non-attempted rate seen in previous series was vastly reduced to below 2%.

Questions 2, 7 and 12 are the dictionary questions, producing success rates between 82% and 93%. Whilst these figures represent noticeable improvement which we celebrate, it remains difficult to understand why 17% of students did not find the correct meaning of “*gargantuan*” or “*copious*”. These students clearly were unable to use a dictionary successfully, or did not have access to one in the examination. The ability to use a dictionary is a required element of the Functional Skills assessment and virtually guarantees three marks in this examination; it is therefore worth the effort. Students should also be taught that there is often more than one definition of a word; thus they need to be guided by the numbers and also check the meaning of the word in context.

Questions 3 and 8 both test implied and inferred meaning and both produced an almost equal division between success and failure, with Q3 slightly out-performing Q8 at 51% and 46% respectively. When asked to identify who the text suggested were most to blame for the suffering of the fish, the most frequent incorrect answer was “*the people who keep fish in tanks in their homes*” rather than the correct response – “*the breeders and collectors who work in the industry*”. The sad truth, of course, is that both are culpable and apportioning blame was difficult. In Q8, almost as many selected the same wrong option as those who got it right: opting for “*each fish needs three gallons of water*” which represented a complete misunderstanding of the instruction to “*provide three gallons of water for every one inch of fish*”. It’s obvious how this misapprehension occurred but those who read and interpreted the text carefully avoided the mistake and selected the correct answer – “*fish are cheaper to keep than other pets*”.

Questions 4 and 9 are the True/False questions in tick-box format. Q9 was slightly more successful in terms of full marks at 47% but both were identical in gaining no marks. Noticeable contributory factors to loss of marks were an incorrect reading of “*Most goldfish are bred in giant tubs then sold to zoos...*” such that “*Goldfish are bred in giant tubs in zoos*” was wrongly identified as True. Secondly, a significant number disagreed with the statement “*Fish in tanks are completely silent*” which should have been given as True as stated in the text, but presumably some students focused on other potential sources of noise which are not made by the fish, such as the air pump. More care in reading should have eliminated the first of these errors but there may be more benefit of doubt given to the second. It was, however, heartening to see a few students making notes on the paper in their efforts to arrive at the correct answers.

It is worth reminding students that full marks requires all four selections to be correct: two correct equals no marks. Some students tick only one or two boxes and immediately deny themselves any marks. An interesting strategy this series was to tick only the boxes which the student identified as “True”, almost seeming to think that the examiner would assume they meant the unmarked lines to

be “False”. Simply following the instructions to “tick the boxes” is the best, indeed the only, strategy here.

For all the tick box questions, the instruction is “*put a tick (✓)*”. A significant number choose to ignore this and utilise a variety of symbols, such as circles, dots, dashes, the letter V; diagonal lines which fill the entire box or a mixture of ticks and crosses according to whether they are selecting T or F. Some even write the full words in the chosen box, which is simply wasting time. Whilst examiners are directed to award the mark if the symbol is in the correct box, this is a functional test, which includes the ability to follow instructions.

Questions 5.1 and Q5.2 test fact and opinion respectively. Once again, many students did not gain the mark on either question, although Q5.1 was four percentage points better than Q5.2. Most errors in Q5.1 arose from a simple misreading of the question, which specifically focused on “*tropical fish*” but, as has become common, far too many students simply spotted a percentage and offered it as their response, regardless of the fact that it did not relate to tropical fish. Similarly, Q5.2 directed students to the last two paragraphs, so those who were simply looking for judgmental words and phrases were drawn to the opening paragraph and ignored the instruction in the question. These questions require two correct answers for one mark so completing only one answer space results in no marks. Students need to take time to read both questions and text carefully.

A very simple point of guidance would be to repeat “Read and answer the question”. A further useful piece of advice here would be not to lift and copy whole sentences as these can often contain two or three acceptable answers but these need to be offered separately in the two designated spaces.

Question 6 This question tests writers’ use of language and can be a useful introduction to GCSE English Language, where the same skill is tested in a similar way. The Scope of Study descriptors for this question are:

- Understand the relationship between textual features and devices, and how they can be used to shape meaning for different audiences and purposes
- Identify different styles of writing and writer’s voice

“How they (words and techniques) can be used to shape meaning” is a crucial part of the assessment here because the majority of entrants are not doing this.

In this series, the task was to explain how the writer uses language to describe the suffering of the fish. The mean mark for this three-mark question was just above one, largely because the majority of responses simply stated that the fish were suffering, often because they were killed. Answers such as these merely demonstrate the skills of reading and transcribing or at best, paraphrasing, but do not attempt to **explain how** the language describes the suffering. There was ample material available and although this is a functional test, students must show that they understand why a writer has chosen particular words, in this instance, to play on the sympathies of readers. So, a simple comment on how “*doomed*” relates to fate or lack of choice or control; “*forced*” and “*robbed*” make their treatment seem violent, or “*tragic*” is designed to make one feel sad, should not be beyond the scope of most students. Better responses commented on the difference between the positive connotations of the opening paragraph – “*majestic*”, “*brilliantly coloured*” and the negative words used to describe the suffering. There was also lots of engagement and empathy with the notion of imagining oneself “*behind glass walls*” as commanded by the text. Less successful attempts focused on the rhyming strapline “*Fish in tanks? No thanks*” and “*Please don’t support the*

ornamental fish trade...” but there is little potential here for focusing on how the fish suffer. Weaker responses simply alluded to the “*poisoning*” or repeated the phrase “*suffer miserably*”.

There has been a much-increased focus on subject terminology in this series: unfortunately, this generally impedes students in meeting the assessment objectives. A large number of responses simply spent considerable time generating long lists of literary techniques, each one accompanied by an example from the text but no attempt at **explaining how** any of these examples work. Such answers can only achieve “identification of relevant material” and stay at one mark.

The mark scheme at the lowest level rewards “identification of relevant material” but statistics and purely factual information do not constitute relevant material for a “describe” task. As noted previously, considerable numbers of students spent their time selecting multiple valid quotations, any one of which could have been used to try and enhance the mark but three or four “simple identification of relevant material” is worth no more than one of the same – one mark. There seems to be an increasing move towards listing and exemplifying a range of techniques with no attempt to comment on how any of the quoted words or phrases work to describe the effects of the app. Students should be guided to choose what they see as the most fruitful quotation and concentrate on **that one only**, trying to explain how the words work in terms of the picture they create or the feelings they evoke in the reader.

Statistically, there was a slight improvement over the previous series with 6% achieving full marks and a further 22% gaining two marks. Once again, over 40% scored one mark for identification of relevant material; almost 26% were awarded zero and over 4% did not attempt this question. The picture is virtually unchanged and clearly indicates that we need much more focus on explaining how language works, particularly given its role as a potential stepping stone to GCSE English Language assessment.

Question 10, the first of the three list questions, asked for three “*reasons why fish make good pets*”. This was a very simple task on which almost 85% of students gained full marks and fewer than 2% scored nothing.

Question 11 however, proved much more problematic. Based on the same source, it asked for three “*instructions people should follow to care for fish properly*”. The material in the text was relatively straightforward in terms of understanding but only 26% managed to comply with the requirement to present this material in the form of **instructions** rather than just lifting the information. A safety net to award one benefit-of-doubt mark was provided for students whose entire answer consisted of accurate information and this applied to almost 30% of entrants. 6% failed to achieve any marks here. Although this is not a writing task, it is a functional task. Producing a few paragraphs of information was not a satisfactory fulfilment of the given task here, nor would it be in an employment situation.

Question 13: Some compensation appeared in the form of a 58% full mark rate on this final list question which required the identification of three “*experiences or projects visitors can enjoy at Sea Life Birmingham*”. A further 26% gained two marks and only 4% did not score. Incorrect answers referred to generic aspects of the visit, such as “*marvel at the sharks*” or “*walk through the sea*” rather than specific project or experience names. Only just over 2% did not attempt the question, which was a very satisfying result on a question so close to the end of the examination.

In all three “List three things” questions, students must be aware that they will be awarded **one mark per response space** so the lifting of sections of text or whole sentences which contain multiple correct answers is a fundamental error in approaching this question. Selecting three individual items and writing each one into one of the response spaces is the only way to achieve success in these questions. Entrants who are using word processors **must** label their points as 1, 2 and 3 in order to

maintain parity with the stipulation for written responses. Typed responses which present all three answers on one line risk being limited to one mark.

Each of the list questions provides three designated, numbered spaces for the three responses. When students attempt to offer additional responses below the designated spaces or on additional pages, examiners will be instructed to disregard these. The only exception arises when something in the three designated spaces is crossed out and additional content is offered in replacement.

Question 14: The comments made in the March report about Q14 are equally applicable to this series and are repeated here together with updated and, in most cases, improved performance measures. It is extremely gratifying to be able to end this report with very positive comments on the comparison question, where performance has been very satisfying. The effort by teachers and their students has proved really fruitful, particularly given that this is the final question on the paper. Many more responses were focused on similarities and differences, often identifying more than one of each and supporting their comments with detail from the source texts. Almost 3% - over 50 students – gained full marks with a further 30% scoring four or five marks. Only 2% did not gain any marks, while 8% made no attempt. Such students could be guided to make a simple double list, jotting down a few similarities or differences and this should help them to gain some marks on this question. However, great credit should go to students and their teachers for the noticeable and very welcome improvement on this final question, which also indicates very commendable stamina and determination.

A word of caution: a small number of students tried to compare all three sources or occasionally just focused on Source A. The question requires a comparison between Source A and Source C. Source B should be entirely discounted. For those students who struggled with timing or focus at the end of the examination, it remains an option to deal with Source A and Source C before Source B, thus generating the possibility of more time to spend on this more valuable question. Advice given previously remains relevant and helpful and is reproduced below. However, great credit should go to students and their teachers for the noticeable and very welcome improvement on this final question, which also indicates very commendable stamina and determination.

There was very limited evidence of planning but this would seem to be a sensible first step in terms of noting down some fundamental similarities and differences. There will always be a thematic link as a starting point and it would be wise to advise students to consult the first page of the insert, which clearly states the text type of each source. This is a given difference which can be utilised and built on: how does the difference in text type determine the choice of language or format, for example? It also removes the uncertainty around identifying text types which has been evident in every series so far.

A particularly gratifying feature of this series is the increased mean mark of well over 18 which was achieved by 62% of the cohort. This is great credit to these students and their teachers, particularly given the very trying circumstances in which the tuition and assessment continues to take place and the inevitable loss of learning sustained.

Evidently, areas where improvement is needed remain, notably Q6 testing writers' use of language, where practice in explaining what the writer's words are doing is needed. In retrieval questions, students should practise reading a text, then the question, then the text again to ensure that they are selecting the best and shortest pieces of evidence to answer the question correctly.

Copying of whole sentences will very rarely, if ever, be required and should be discouraged. Copying paragraphs wastes the student's time and is almost bound to deny the mark.

The issue of indiscriminate lifting of sections of text with very little attempt to select the correct answer was much reduced this series. Such responses will never be successful: they clearly

signal a student who is not confident to identify the appropriate text and offers large chunks in the hope that these contain something of value. Functionally literate students read the question and do what it asks by searching for and selecting the salient points and presenting these in the correct way, avoiding any extraneous material which at the very least is likely to waste time but in the worst cases, may disallow the mark.

The advice in this report can be distilled into two specific instructions to students:

- 1. Read the question and do only what the question asks.**
- 2. Read the text and select only the words to answer the question. An answer which spills out of the space on any of the list questions, is too long.**

We begin 2022 still wrestling with the impact of Covid 19 but with the tentative hope that circumstances may be set to improve; Spring brought about little respite for any of us and the Summer series has probably borne the vestiges of the combined frustrations and difficulties in educational and assessment terms of the past three years. For Functional Skills, examinations have gone ahead as usual but the preparation and revision for these is likely to have been particularly taxing for staff and students alike. This industrious cohort, together with their resolute, diligent teachers, has soldiered on and all deserve to be recognised and warmly commended. It is hoped that teachers and students alike will now be enjoying a well-earned rest, perhaps basking in some warmer climes with some beautiful tropical fish for company.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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