
FUNCTIONAL SKILLS ENGLISH LEVEL 1

8720/R/S/W

Report on the Examination

8720

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8720/R

The March series focused on the topic of alcohol with Source A and B both addressing the issue of post-exam underage drinking. Source A was a news report about the scale of the problem in the town of Newquay and the actions taken to deal with the issues, while Source B covered the dilemma of a mother asked to buy alcohol for her daughter to take to a post-exam party. Source C explained the physical problems caused by alcohol consumption. With summer examinations on the horizon, this was felt to be a particularly relevant subject which was handled sensitively and provoked a good number of lively, engaged responses.

Qs 1, 4 and 15, tick box style, ask students to identify which statements are true and which false, thereby testing close reading and comprehension. **Q1** and **Q4** had almost identical full-mark rates of 36% with **Q15** slightly lower at just under one-quarter. Unfortunately, the proportion achieving zero marks was unusually high at over 1/5 on **Q1** and **Q4**, and particularly disappointing on **Q15** at over 30%.

The main error in **Q1** related to a misunderstanding of the reason for Fiona Pendry's insomnia. Significant numbers of students selected True for the statement "*Worrying about underage drinking stopped her from sleeping*" when in fact the source clearly attributed the lack of sleep to the noise created by the drinkers. The most common error in **Q4** was a misunderstanding of "*No one younger than 25 was allowed to drink alcohol*" as True when the source actually reported that "*...everyone who looked younger than 25 had to show ID*". The overwhelming error in **Q15** related to a misreading of the sentence "*The toxins in alcohol contribute to the build-up of fat cells below the surface of the skin, called cellulite.*" Many students incorrectly selected "*The surface of the skin is called cellulite*" as True. This is a clear indication of the need to teach the importance of reading the whole of the sentence, not just a phrase.

Q16, the test of fact and opinion, also in tick-box style, was very well-answered with full-mark rates just below 50% and only 16% failing to achieve any marks. It was, however, quite startling to see how often "*Alcohol tastes delicious*" was designated as a fact.

Once again, significant numbers of students did not follow the clear instruction to "put a tick (✓)". A variety of symbols are used, 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.

Despite previous comments in these reports, significant numbers of students **continue to tick only one or two of the four boxes** and immediately condemn themselves to zero marks. **If they tick only two boxes, they will get zero**, even if both these choices are correct. An additional correct tick would gain one mark. Please remind students that **they must attempt every box**.

Qs 2, 5 and 13 are the dictionary questions. 77% were successful in identifying the meaning of "*boisterous*" in **Q1**, falling to 60% in **Q13** – "*transitory*" - where 23% selected its exact antonym of "*lasting*". **Q5** was the most disappointing where only 35% correctly chose "*party-goers*" for "*revellers*" while over 40% opted for "*trouble-makers*" which can surely only be attributed to a guess. These figures show a regression in dictionary skills, out of line with what has been steady progress in previous series. The low not-attempted rates would suggest that students are either not choosing to use provided dictionaries or do not have one available.

Practice in developing dictionary skill could usefully form part of future lessons. It would also be worthwhile teaching students that alternative definitions sometimes appear and to look for the numerals which would indicate this. When students try to change an answer by overwriting, it can be difficult to discern which letter they wish to submit as their final answer. Please advise students not to overwrite, but clearly cross out and write the alternative next to the crossed out response. It is perfectly acceptable to write a second-attempt answer outside the box, in the cause of clarity, however, two letters presented in the form of “A or C” will result in loss of the mark. There was some evidence of good practice in students clearly eliminating some of the possibilities and working through the options systematically, which was very pleasing to see.

Q3: This was the picture question in the March series and performance was very disappointing. Students were directed to Picture 1, which was a photograph of a large group of adults campaigning for change in Newquay and carrying placards relating to the range of problems being experienced in the town. Students were required to distil from this evidence the correct answer that “*There were not enough police on the streets*”: unfortunately only one-quarter were able to do so. Almost 40% opted for “*The problems in the town were not being dealt with*” which could clearly be discerned from the text, which lists the problems and immediately states “...*nothing was being done to stop it*”. There were a number of placards to read which could have contributed to the difficulty level but all the incorrect options were evident in the written text and all three could have been eliminated. Students need to remember that this question is always worded to ask about “**extra** information” in the picture.

Qs 7.1 and 7.2 were based on information about university students who were socialising without alcohol and were surveyed about the experience. **Q7.1** asked students to identify one worry (ie negative thing) the students had about not drinking when socialising and **Q7.2** one positive effect the students noticed from not drinking. Both questions worked very well with success rates of 80% and 63% respectively. Where the mark was not gained, it was generally as a result of missing vital information eg for Q7.2 “*able to sleep **soundly / better***” was a correct answer only if the emboldened content was included.

Whilst we attempt to give Level 1 students the benefit of the doubt in regard to the way responses are expressed, students should be advised that only their first attempt will be acceptable. What is being assessed here is the ability to “*identify and understand the main points, ideas and details in texts*”. “*Identify*” means “select” and it cannot be right that some students are rewarded for copying several points into the space meant for one point and sometimes arriving at a right answer only by the second or third attempt. Furthermore, inclusion of a positive and a negative **in the same answer** is likely to invalidate the mark. Students should be advised to choose **one positive** and **one negative** only and put each of these into the relevant space.

Q9 assessed punctuation. Students were asked about the function of the inverted commas in the quotation “...*the benefits of saying ‘No’ to a drink*”. Only just over half of entrants gained the mark here, the most commonly selected incorrect answer being “*‘No’ is the most important word in the sentence*” offered by 28% of the students. There is clearly work needed here.

Q10 which asks for two similarities between Source A and B was a little more successful than in January with 44% achieving two marks and 14% gaining no marks. The simplest way to gain two marks in this series was to say “*Both sources are about alcohol / underage drinking and both contain a picture*”. However, whilst “*both sources contain a picture*” generally gains a mark, students should be advised that the safest way is to say at least one thing about the overall subject matter, since the sources are chosen to be thematically linked. Certainly, guessing that both sources may contain a title, image, sub-headings etc is an unnecessary risk. In this case, answers

such as “*Both sources are about underage drinking and both refer to parties / celebrating end of exams*” would have been perfect.

Q11 Unfortunately, the other half of this comparison question, which asks about two differences was very poorly done. Only a little over 8% managed to secure the full two marks with 44% gaining one mark and almost half scoring zero, including 7% who did not attempt the question. A significant number of students have clearly been taught that there is a virtually guaranteed mark for those who remember to check the front of the insert to see the correct definition of the text types, such that “*Source A is a news report/ story and Source B is an online advice forum*” was a common submission. Finding a basis for a second comparison eluded the majority and it was disappointing to see students trying very hard, offering earnest, detailed comments about both sources which could not be rewarded as they were simply presented as two separate comments with no basis for comparison. The improvement commented on in the January report was not sustained in this series.

At the simplest level, comparison of the content of the pictures (if there are two of them of course!) would be fruitful, but checking for precise differences in content should also be encouraged. There are often elements of perceptive comment on the sources but without a valid comparison between the two, these answers cannot be rewarded.

It might be useful to advise students that the starting point is to think about the similarity and then try to identify differences which arise from the similarity (which they have, hopefully, already identified in Q10). Classroom practice for this question could perhaps take the form of asking students to draw up a bullet point list of differences between the two sources using the guidance in the question, then forming these into responses like “*Both sources are about underage drinking but in Source A it involved a whole town and in Source B it was just a mother and daughter affected*”. This should steer students away from simply making a comment about each source independently.

The following guidance, reproduced from previous reports, remains valid.

- Advise students to look at the front of the insert, which clearly identifies the text type and this is a completely acceptable way to secure a valid difference.
- Students need to be specific in the points they make so steering them away from the type of generic comments which plagued Q8 responses in the legacy specification would be advisable. Responses such as “*Both texts use paragraphs*” or “*Source A is a webpage and Source B / the other one isn't*” will not be rewarded. The latter comment simply points out that the sources are different, which the question already indicates. Students need to say what the difference is. Students should also be advised to avoid unrelated pronouns.
- Comments which are not comparing like with like are sometimes offered: “*Source A uses sub-headings and Source B is a podcast*”, for example.
- Finally, pictures. One of the sources will always contain a picture, in order to deliver the relevant scope of study descriptor assessment. There is no guarantee that both sources will contain an image so the pre-planned response referred to above must be avoided. If both sources do contain an image, students will be able to gain a mark for identifying this in **Q10**. If only one source contains a picture, this will not form a valid route for a mark in **Q11**. However, if both sources contain an image, a mark can be gained in **Q11** by identifying a difference in the content of the pictures: “*Source A has a picture of a large group of people while Source B has a photograph of just two people*”.

Q17: After reading Source C – a webpage explaining the effects of alcohol – students were asked to make a list of “*the ways alcohol can affect someone’s appearance*”. The emboldening of the word “*appearance*” in the question should have reminded students that responses such as “*smelly breath*” and “*a hangover*” were not valid or creditworthy. Equally, incomplete information such as “*alcohol makes your whole body drier*” would not score without reference to “*the skin*”. Some students went straight to the first sentence of the source and selected “*a sparkle in the eyes*” which might sound promising but the context of the question specified a concern about **the damage** caused by alcohol so this positive image was not relevant. Only 9% achieved full marks; a further quarter gaining two marks with almost as many regrettably scoring zero and 6% not attempting the question.

It would be helpful to remind students that this is a functional test: reading the question and complying with its precise requirements are important elements of the assessment.

This is the highest tariff question on the paper and it is clear that a number of students arrive here depleted in terms of time and/or energy and lack focus and motivation. There is no reason why Source C and its 10 marks of questions could not be attempted first, thus completing Q17 while still relatively fresh.

The mean mark this series was two points lower than that in January at just over 14 and was achieved by a little more than half of entrants. While this dip in performance is inevitably somewhat disappointing there have been pleasing successes in both **Q7s** and achievement on **Q10** has increased, which is gratifying to see. There are obvious areas for intervention, for example, improvements in dictionary skills could relatively swiftly secure increased attainment. Fundamentals such as careful reading of the questions as well as the sources need constant revisiting and reminders and it is very clear from the overall level of engagement and effort put into the responses that there is a great deal of hard work going on in classrooms - strenuous efforts by teachers, support staff and students focused on improving performance.

A plea regarding word-processed responses. Please could these students be advised that they **must number the questions**: it is virtually impossible to navigate a script which has few breaks between lines of response and no question numbers. For the multiple choice questions some students type out their chosen answer in full; some students even type out all four options in full – both are a complete waste of time. It is only necessary to type the question number and the single letter of the chosen response eg **Q2 A**. Compliance with these requests would be particularly helpful.

This series wrestled with a difficult and potentially divisive subject, but one which is at the forefront of modern cultural life. It is hoped that the materials, which appear to have been well received by the students, will have sounded useful warnings of the potential hazards associated with alcohol, particularly for young people, while also offering some useful information on alternative ways of socialising without drinking.

8720/S

Please note that this report covers the Spoken English component for Functional Skills English for both Level 1 (8720) and Level 2 (8725)

Introduction

Many centres took the opportunity to enter this round of submissions. For most centres it was straightforward to verify their work.

Most centres used the newly designed Candidate Record Form (CRF) date 2022/3. This has been amended in the following ways:

- It no longer requires a student signature
- In the section on Presentation teachers **are required** to give **the title** of the student's presentation and then **add some comments on their assessment of it**
- The Discussion section is more clearly set out

Use of this form is compulsory, as is the requirement to comment on the assessment of the presentation. A number of centres omitted to do this.

Overall this new form is working well and makes it clear to teachers that students need to fulfil all the criteria from 3.1 to 3.8 to be awarded a pass.

Continued improvement was seen in the range of topic students covered, and in the improved quality of questions, especially from teachers.

In each of these reports key problems are highlighted. It would be really helpful if these issues could be addressed immediately by centres.

Too many students read their presentation, without any attempt to engage with their audience. If this is the case in Level 1 then teachers must question the students at length and in depth for all criteria to be fulfilled. If it happens at Level 2, which is a higher standard with more rigorous requirements then the centre should deem the student(s) not ready to be entered. The student(s) should then be taught how to deliver a presentation, addressing an audience directly while still using supporting material where necessary.

The next problem area is an administrative one and involves the labelling of files on the submitted USBs. Some centres used their own labelling system which was unhelpful. Please follow the AQA guidance on naming audio visual files. At the very least your verifier needs to see the candidate number and the student's surname. It can be an impossible task for a verifier to find the student they need to look at if there is merely a list of first names, or even worse a random set of numbers.

Another issue involves seeking an exemption from filming in what should be a few and highly specific cases – after all a filmed presentation is a requirement of the specification, and this component forms part of the subject as a whole. Centres must understand it is not possible to seek an exemption from filming *after* they have already given the student a pass. The exemption must be sought before submitting a grade and the CRF must provide detailed description of the student's presentation and discussion. In some cases centres had not approached AQA at all, and simply wrote to the verifier (who is not on the AQA staff) saying why they had given the exemptions themselves. This cannot happen.

All centres need to understand that verifiers work at home, with no secretarial help. This means that centres must not send correspondence in batches, as it proves impossible for a verifier, with hundreds of items to deal with, to match up, for example, a USB in one envelope and a centre specific password (which is against the rules anyway) in another.

If you must use a password for your submission the June AQA password is MVx_2309

Centres should not send items using the Royal Mail silver labelled next day special delivery service. While it may seem this is the speediest and safest way to send items, it is neither of these, for the simple reason that posties are not allowed to deliver them unless the person they are addressed to is in the house to receive them. What happens is that they are delayed in depots, often for days, and involve lots of extra work.

And while on the subject of the postal system, please do not make your verifier pay a surcharge by putting insufficient (or in some cases none at all) postage stamps on the mail.

Please note that submissions on CD/DVD can no longer be accepted.

Below are key aspects of the specification which have appeared in previous reports and are reproduced here as key facts for teachers and exam officers who may be new to the specification or need reminders.

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 a discussion. These are separate assessments. Failure to do both of these, and equally importantly failure to *evidence* these, means the student cannot pass.

For a presentation there must be a video recording, plus a completion of the presentation part of the record form, with comment on the performance. 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 must fail, or probably more appropriately 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.

What follows below is a reminder of the systematic steps that need to be followed.

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 specific reasons that make it impossible to conduct visual recordings then exemptions must be sought from AQA well in advance of the submission deadline and before any grades are submitted.

The Candidate Record form should be completed at the time of the activity. This will indicate to the teacher whether the student has fulfilled all criteria, and is ready to be entered, or whether the student needs further opportunities and needs to be entered at a later date.

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.

Only those teachers who have followed the standardising procedures should be awarding passes.

Please **do not** enter students if you do not have the required evidence to do so. The negotiations that are required with centres to support belatedly what they awarded earlier can be very time-consuming and can lead to many withdrawals of students at the last minute.

5. So to summarise: *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.

6. 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.

7. Check that the files play on windows media player, on a computer. Check that visuals can be seen and that sound can be heard.

8. 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.

9. Check that you have completed and forwarded a Centre Declaration Sheet 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.

10. Have all materials ready for verification by the deadline.

11. 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 and which specification is being entered.

Conclusion

The very best talks are those where students talk about authentic experiences, which are then teased out for their implications by subtle and sensitive questioning. Some of the best of these were from students for whom English is not their first language and who have lived an already challenging life.

Many teachers had worked very hard with their students and their efforts are much appreciated.

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[Centre Declaration sheet 2023](#)

[Candidate Record Form 2023](#)

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

8720/W

Overview

This is the 13th series under the reformed Functional Skills in English specification, Level 1 Writing (8720W). Although there is still some disruption to education due to the Coronavirus it would appear that the trend is now more positive in terms of entries and this series confirmed the trend.

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 page 9 of the AQA Specification <https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/resources/english/specifications/AQA-8720-8725-SP-2019.PDF>

At Level 1 learners are required to produce straightforward texts such as narratives, instructions, 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 a pass at this level will be a strong indicator of ability in writing Standard English. It is consistent in its standard as a test of basic English writing skills and will be the foundation for secure progression. With the current demands of GCSE English, many schools and colleges are considering alternative routes for students who are seriously stretched. This qualification would also serve as a suitable alternative and an excellent progression route from The Entry Level Certificate (Step Up to English). It is important that schools and colleges enable students to have a realistic chance of acquiring valuable qualifications by mapping abilities against available qualifications. In this way, the reformed Functional English will provide important opportunities for both centres and students.

To ensure continuity under the reformed specification the writing papers have retained two questions. Each contains stimulus material leading into a task which is supported by bullet points, 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 increased to 27, with 9 marks for Question 1 (6 for composition, 3 for SPaG) and 18 marks for Question 2 (9 for composition, 9 for SPaG). An important point to note is that SPaG comprises 44% of total marks, an increase of 4% over the previous specification, reflecting its importance at this level. 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>

At this level, centres now very rarely enter students who have little or no chance of getting inside the middle level of Mark Scheme descriptors. In this series, though the entry was modest, students seemed generally confident and able to meet the requirements of the questions with almost 90% of students gaining a mark of 10 or more which was closely aligned with the January statistics while approximately 41% gained a mark of 18 or more which was marginally weaker than January. In the circumstances, students achieving a mark of 18 are well suited to the demands of Level 2 and should be encouraged to progress. Students whose marks fall below a total of 18 need a little more in the way of skill development before they progress to Level 2. Close examination of the centre's mark profile would be very useful in establishing appropriate progression routes for students.

Question 1

This question asked students to email the local council with their views about how best to use empty spaces and waste land. The question clearly fell into the category of 'explanation' although other modes of writing would be involved. At standardising, it was clear that for the majority, the task offered no barriers to the completion of the task. However, a considerable number of students responded with suggestions for the improvement of the derelict site pictured in the stimulus material. This was accepted as a valid response to the task at Level 1 and students were not disadvantaged taking this approach. Another group of students wrote about the need to improve the immediate locality, such as holes in a fence, or potholes in the road, or fallen trees and these answers were also felt to be valid responses.

Students were asked to write between 80 and 120 words. It is important to understand that the length of answers is clearly addressed in the mark scheme and that marginal infringements of this aspect of the question would not deny a student access to the highest band provided the standard of writing composition justified it. As the time advised for this question is only 20 minutes, students who spent too long and wrote too much may have been doubly disadvantaged. Overall, although it is not possible to provide definitive figures, most students met the requirements of word length for this question. The nature of this question allowed for perfectly valid answers that were close to, or just above, the lower word limit. Some of these answers fulfilled the requirements of the question to a very high standard. Excessively long answers were self-penalising as they lost focus and clarity while very short answers, below 50 words or so, were unlikely to achieve marks above the bottom level (1-2 marks).

Most students saw the task very clearly. They selected an area in the locality and were able to address the issue of improvement clearly. Explanations were strong when students wrote about the ways in which their community would benefit. Very few students missed the task and it was clear that most had been well prepared for a clearly transactional piece of writing.

Answers in the top band for composition (5-6 marks) approached the task in a well-structured way. The first element of the response was to select a place in their locality that would benefit from improvement. When this was clearly identified it was often the case that the student would then be able to present the negative aspects of their selected place through logical and sequenced explanation. The final bullet point allowed for speculative and sometimes imaginative proposals. The best answers did not fall into the trap of unrealistic or fanciful suggestion which no local council could support. For example, one very strong answer suggested the building of a small arts centre to house the work of local painters and sculptors. Other strong responses simply handed back the responsibility of developing the area to the council itself, but with a clear injunction to ensure that the development benefited the community as a whole and not the developers themselves. Many answers in the top band talked about the ways in which features like local parks, youth clubs and libraries had been neglected and remained in need of investment and refurbishment.

It is often the case that the language found in the better answers was able to reflect the content more effectively than that in weaker answers. The use of specific vocabulary such as 'an area that has significantly stood out for me', 'equipment is unsafe, broken and rusty' or 'for kids to socialise and mix' were found in excellent answers. Sentences were varied and sometimes complex, again adding to the impact of the response. In the strongest answers, students established a clear explanatory sequence by using phrases such as 'in order to...', 'so that...', 'if the ground is prepared', 'after the rubbish is removed' and so on.

Answers in the middle band for content (3-4 marks) often just about met minimum standards in terms of length but were able to engage with the task in terms of audience and purpose. Key

elements of the explanation were present in these answers, such as the identification of the place that needed improvement or a simple request for the council to take action. Because of issues around length these answers tended to have a more generalised quality.

The very weakest answers, in the bottom band were almost invariably too short, with students unable to provide much beyond reference to a party. Answers in the bottom band were often incoherent with vocabulary alone (without clear sentences and grammatical structure) providing the only basis for the reader to grasp meaning. Other students wrote only two or three sentences. While such answers were usually on topic they remained very much at the 'attempt' level with little awareness of purpose. Around 7% of students fell into this band which shows how well centres are able to match their students to an appropriate level in Functional Skills in English.

Before leaving Question 1, it is important to remember that it carries a maximum of only 9 marks (including SPG) and it is recommended that students spend no more than 20 minutes answering it. Students who spend too long on this question are putting themselves at a serious disadvantage because they are losing time on Question 2 which is worth twice as many marks. Also, it is extremely unlikely that the maximum mark for Question 1 would deliver a pass for the student, but this is not true for Question 2.

Question 2

This question gave students an opportunity to write about an enjoyable experience. It was clearly a question in the 'narrative' category. Students were asked to write an account of their favourable experience when visiting Bramby Fair. The stimulus material was worded in such a way as to provide confidence to students with hints at aspects of content such as 'free car parking', 'arcades' and so on. There were no specific requirements that needed to be taken into consideration and the panel of examiners found only a very tiny number of answers that were not really relevant to the task

Nearly all students were able to produce narrative writing of some sort ranging from the detailed and complex to the more mundane.

In the top band for composition (7-9 marks), answers showed an inherent understanding of the need to provide a context for their narrative. For example, one student talked about the element of uncertainty that she felt before visiting the fair, but which disappeared once she entered the grounds. Other students talked of the way in which their trip was seen as a special occasion to accompany a family reunion while others talked of visiting the fairground with their close friends.

Of necessity, it was the provision of detailed description and information in the body of the answer that took students into the top band. Rides were described by name ('Flying Scrap', 'Top Square') or were presented through appropriate terminology whilst the food outlets were often defined by the high quality of the produce on offer. One student wrote cleverly about the way in which the staff at the fairground stopped an incident of bullying and it was clear that many students saw safety as a key element of a good experience at a fairground. Whilst there was no requirement for students to provide obligatory content the vast majority of top band students had no difficulty in writing fluently about an exciting day. Another feature of a well-constructed narrative was the sense of closure and the need, as an element of a review, to provide a recommendation or rating.

One of the key descriptors for the top level is: 'Sentence structures, including complex sentences, convey meaning clearly'. This is often a determinant of a good mark as detailed, developed content can be delivered only through such a range of sentences. Simple, single clause sentences simply do not carry the information and ideas in a way that enables full understanding. In this series, for

those students who were able to reach this standard, the quality of the language identified their answers and reflected their content very effectively. Sentences such as 'However, the only negative was that there were only two vegan dishes available' provide clear evidence of effective language use in the top band.

Answers in middle level (marks 4-6) offered relevant material, but there was evidence of a lack of depth and confidence and occasionally credibility in the answers. Some of the answers in this band missed out on possibly more interesting aspects of content by focusing on one aspect such as the free car parking or the food. Nevertheless, in all cases in this band, students were able to write effectively about an enjoyable day.

As with Question 1, the weakest answers, in the 1-3 level were often extremely brief and the student failed to provide significant information, detail or logical sequence to sustain a narrative that met the needs of the task. The barest elements of narrative structure were present and the sentence structure was weak. For example students listed the fairground rides that were available without actually narrating their experience in experiencing the ride and thus missing an opportunity to display skills or vocabulary that might lift the mark. However, this is the lowest of the three bands and in this series, some 84% so of students were above this level. This was a very strong outcome, in line with the January cohort and points perhaps to a lifting of the standard over time. It may well be that some centres do not now enter their weakest students for Level 1 in Functional Skills in English but choose the Entry Level Certificate (Step Up To English) instead. On a further encouraging note, only 5% or so of students failed to attempt the question, which is lower than the January percentage.

Students should be advised that this question carries 18 marks and should therefore be given enough time to gain as many of these marks as possible. There was clear evidence, in a large number of answers, that the students had not spent sufficient time on this answer in either planning or writing.

SPG

Spelling: at the top level students used specialist language effectively. Words and phrases such as 'significantly', 'construction', 'abandoned', 'attractive', 'has given me the motivation to address this issue...' 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, 'few examples of conventional spelling' is a key descriptor in the mark scheme. Phonetic spelling of common words was a evident throughout the lowest band answers; eg 'as' instead of 'has', 'couden' instead of 'couldn't'

Punctuation: sentence demarcation is the most significant issue in punctuation and answers in the top level displayed accuracy throughout. Occasionally, more complex punctuation is used but not always accurately. In the middle level, sentence punctuation is accurate when sentences are straightforward. At the bottom level, students gaining a mark of 3 are likely to use comma-splicing throughout, while those gaining 1 or 2 marks are more likely to use no punctuation.

Grammar: At the bottom level a range of grammatical errors are found which makes reading very difficult. The main problems were:

issues around tense especially shifting between past and present
failure to use apostrophe in contracted forms
omission of verbs in phrases which include the present participle, such as 'I visiting...'
subject/verb agreement;

lack of confidence in the use of passive voice
the use of conjunctions or coherence markers;
lengthy sentences which lost the thread of meaning;

In middle and top levels the scale of grammatical inaccuracy varied considerably but the crucial indicator was the ability to follow what was written.

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

In relation to performance, on Question 1, over 28% of answers were in the top level for SPaG, which was encouraging, while only 10% were in the bottom level, again a very strong performance.

On Question 2, approximately 24% of answers were in the top level with some 14% in the bottom level.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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