

Chief Examiner Report for Functional Skills English: Reading

NCFE Level 1 Functional Skills Qualification in English (603/5058/1)

NCFE Level 2 Functional Skills Qualification in English (603/5054/4)

Window: 09th December – 13th December 2019 (Paper

Level 1 Pass Mark	18 / 30
Level 2 Pass Mark	16 / 30

Each learner's external assessment paper is marked by an Examiner and awarded a raw mark. During the awarding process, a combination of statistical analysis and professional judgement is used to establish the raw marks that represent the minimum required standard to achieve a Pass grade. As well as analysing performance on the assessment paper itself, performance standards and statistical outcomes in legacy qualifications and equivalent assessments (both within NCFE and, where available, across other awarding organisations) are considered to ensure Pass marks represent comparable standards

Generic Overview

Most learners seemed to engage with the texts in these assessments and were able to obtain some relevant information. However, many learners appeared to be unprepared for some of the specific demands of Reformed Functional Skills English Reading. Skills in some Scope of Study areas were very weak, for Level 2 notably 12, 14, 16, 17 and 19. For Level 1 SoS 10, 12, 14, 15, and 18 are the areas that need particular attention.

Level 1

The topic of this paper was how hobbies can help children to learn. The first document was an article and the second a report. Most learners were able to answer about half of the questions correctly. However, some learners left numerous questions unanswered and were clearly struggling to provide correct answers to others. It is essential that learners are prepared for assessment and are entered at the correct level. Successful learners gave complete and succinct answers using information found in the source documents. Learners failing or at borderline found questions based on higher order skills more challenging.

Question 1 was a multiple-choice question that required learners to state the main purpose of Document 1, and on the whole, most were able to do this successfully.

Question 2 asked why people go to comic conventions. Again, this was a more straightforward question (for SoS 19) and the majority of learners were able to provide the correct answer.





Question 3 required learners to find out the meaning of words. They were asked to say what meaning of the phrase ‘fast-paced world’ meant as used in the first paragraph of Document 1. Acceptable answers included: ‘no time’, ‘a busy life’ and ‘having lots of things to do’. Some learners give very literal answers that didn’t gain marks, these included: ‘being quick’, ‘everyone is moving fast’.

Question 4 asked learners to give two examples from the document that show how hobbies can improve people’s well-being. This was a straightforward question for SoS 19 and most learners were able to gain the two available marks.

Question 5 targeted SoS 15 and asked learners to infer meaning from one of the images. The image was of an elderly couple clearly enjoying a bike ride. Successful responses were along the line that ‘cycling is sociable or fun’ or ‘you can cycle at any age’. Answers that simply stated what was in the photograph, such as ‘the picture is a couple cycling’ and ‘you can cycle in the park’, did not gain marks.

Question 6 required learners to state whether two statements from the document were a fact or an opinion. Most learners got this correct. Some very weak candidates did not answer this question. With a 50:50 chance of getting a correct answer, I would advise centres to encourage all learners to provide one of the options given in these boxes.

Question 7 asked learners to identify the language features in these excerpts:

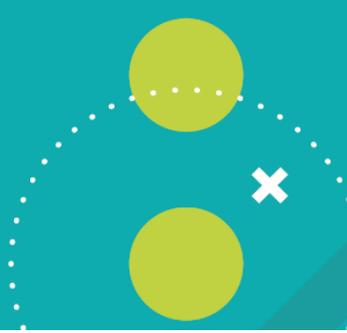
- a) ‘beyond all recognition’
- b) ‘After all, what child doesn’t love playing?’

It was clear from the vast majority of responses that many learners did not understand language features. The correct answers were a) exaggeration and b) rhetorical question. Only a small minority of learners gained full marks in this question. Many responses tried to explain the meaning of the excerpts. Some answers said ‘fact’ or ‘opinion’, others clearly mistook the question to be about punctuation. This is an area that needs particular focus from centres.

Question 8 was about the use of a caption underneath one of the images. Learners were asked to explain why it had been used. Hardly any learners were able to do so using the specific context of the document. Most gave generic responses such as ‘to tell you what is in the photo’. Marks were only awardable when the answer linked directly to the text. So, responses such as: *to show that the child is learning while relaxing* or *to show that hobbies help children learn* gained marks.

Question 9 targeted SoS 17 and the use of specialist words in context and asked learners to say what the word ‘cosplay’ meant in the context of the article. Most learners gave a correct response, which was *dressing up* or *pretending to be a character*.





Question 10 asked learners to explain why the writer had used an exclamation mark in paragraph 2. Again, answers that gave a generic reason for the use of exclamation marks were not awardable. Learners needed to clearly root their answers in the text. *So to show that hobbies can be good in unexpected ways or to highlight that hobbies can improve your work life* gained marks; whereas *to make the sentence stand out or to show the writer's strong feelings* did not gain marks.

Question 11 required learners to state whether two statements from the document were examples of advisory or descriptive language. Most learners got this correct. Some very weak candidates did not answer this question. With a 50:50 chance of getting a correct answer, I would advise centres to encourage all learners to provide one of the options given in these boxes.

Question 12 asked learners to give two quotations from Document 2 where the writer used language to explain the benefits of learning to read and write. This seemed straightforward for most of this cohort, with the majority of learners gaining at least one of the two available marks. Some weaker learners failed to understand the question and gave answers such as *say the alphabet, write our names* which did not answer the question.

Question 13 required learners to find a word or phrase to replace the phrase 'build their skills' as used in the 'Can hobbies help?' section of the report. Learners must take care with these sorts of questions as examiners were not looking for a definition of 'build their skills' but a word or words that could replace them exactly from the source document. *So improve, get better, learn, boost their skills* etc were all acceptable responses. However, some learners said *this means to make their skills even better* or similar, and as this could not replace the phrase given, no marks were awardable.

Question 14 required learners to state whether two statements from the document were a fact or an opinion. Most learners got this correct. Some very weak candidates did not answer this question. With a 50:50 chance of getting a correct answer, I would advise centres to encourage all learners to provide one of the options given in these boxes.

Question 15 required learners to say if the language used in this quotation was formal or informal. '*Research shows that hobbies can help children to learn*'

Almost all learners correctly answered this question.

Question 16 targeted SoS 17 and the use of specialist words in context and asked learners to say what the word 'literacy' meant in the context of the article. Most learners gave a correct response, which was *reading/writing*. Some learners said *English* and others lifted this sentence from the document *Literacy is important because it helps us to understand the world*, neither response would have gained marks.

Question 17 targeted SoS 9 and asked learners:

a) Using Document 2, how can computer games help a child's literacy skills?





b) What does the report say will keep a child's mind healthy?

With the majority of the cohort able to provide correct responses, this appeared to be a straightforward question.

Question 18 asked learners to say why these organisational features had been used

a) Subheading 'Aim'

b) Bullet-pointed list:

- say the alphabet
- write our names
- sound out different words

While the majority of learners were able to give a generic answer about the use of these organisational features, scant few were able to give answers where their explanations were rooted in the text. For example, these responses were not awardable:

- a) *to tell you what the aim is* OR *to tell you what a section of the text is about*
b) *to make it easier to read* OR *to draw your attention to important points*

Examiners were looking for:

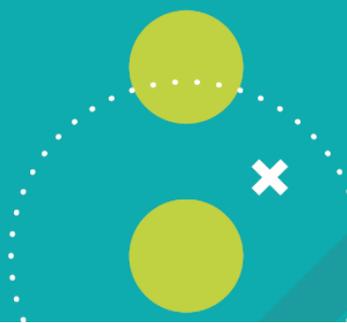
- a) *to introduce the idea that hobbies can be linked to literacy* OR *explains that the report will discuss how hobbies can help children to learn*
b) *explains what we learn when we are young* OR *to list what you need to know to read/write.*

Questions about organisational features are an area that needs particular focus for centres – learners must be taught to make specific reference to the texts in their answers.

Question 19 targeted SoS 15 and asked learners to say why an image had been used in the document. In these questions learners must guard against giving a description of the image. Instead they should consider the image in the context of the overall meaning of the document. In this instance the photograph was of a clearly happy adult and child reading together. Correct answers were: *to show a parent enjoying reading with a child* OR *To show that reading can be fun*. Answers such as: *To show a father and daughter reading together* did not give the idea of fun or enjoying reading and were not awardable.

Question 20 asked learners to compare the information, ideas and opinions given in Document 1 about how hobbies can help build literacy skills with what is said about this in Document 2. Answers awarded all three available marks for this did exactly what was required and marshalled their answers effectively using examples from the texts. Weak answers gave no comparisons and simply restated each document's contents. For full marks examiners were looking for answers that clearly used both documents to compare information, ideas and opinions clearly and effectively - e.g.





Document 1 says children like to dress up and recreate the superhero stories they have read, Document 2 says children learn better when they are reading about topics that interest them such as superheroes

Advice to centres for Level 1 Reading

SoS 10

Learners must read the question carefully to ensure they are comparing information from the documents they are told to. In their answers they should make clear to which document they are referring. They should also consider information from all the documents the question requires of them. Comparison should be explicit. Learners scoring higher marks on these questions are able to compare both information and ideas backed up with evidence from the relevant texts.

SoS 12

It remains apparent that many learners have not been taught about language features. At Level 1, learners can be expected to identify these in texts and to explain their effect on the reader. Language features might include: rule of three, rhetorical questions, irony, exaggeration and so on.

SoS 14

Answers to these questions were very mixed. Some learners simply did not understand what organisational features were. Others were able to identify the features but not explain why they had been used in the text. Organisational features may include images, bullet points, numbered lists, headings and subheadings and so on.

SoS 15

Many learners simply stated what the picture was in answer to these questions, which is incorrect. They must relate the image to the text and answer the specific question asked.

SoS 18

Again, answers to these questions must directly related to the texts and not provide generic explanation of the use of punctuation marks. For example, in an explanation of the use of brackets: *To give extra detail that isn't needed*, would not gain a mark; whereas *To give additional information about the office opening hours* would be awardable.

Level 2

The topic of this paper was urban trees and their upkeep. The first document was a report from the council, the second was an advert for a tree care company and the third was a set of letters from a local newspaper. Most learners attempted to answer the majority of questions. However, some learners left numerous questions unanswered and were clearly struggling to provide correct





answers to others. It is essential that learners are prepared for assessment and are entered at the correct level. Many learners were very unprepared for this assessment and scored low marks. There are some more challenging requirements at RFS Reading Level 2 that will take some time to teach. As with Level 1, there was a trend for weaker learners to use generic comments in many answers and not relate their responses directly to the texts they had read.

Question 1 was a multiple-choice question that required learners to choose a word to best describe the style of Document 1, and on the whole, most learners were able to do this successfully.

Question 2 asked learners to say why these organisational features had been used:

- a) Subheadings
- b) Lettered list.

While the majority of learners were able to give a generic answer about the use of these organisational features, very few were able to give answers where their explanations were rooted in the text. For example, these responses were not awardable:

- a) *to separate the main points of the report OR to inform the reader what is in the next paragraph*
- b) *to present the information in an orderly fashion OR to avoid confusion and help the reader keep track of each point*

Examiners were looking for:

- a) *To divide the different sections on the tree removal proposal in the report OR To make it easier to locate information on the proposal, the reasons for tree removal and how to appeal*
- b) *To make it easy to locate different information within each overall section,, such as number of trees to be felled, number of traffic accidents, rules for the appeal procedure etc OR To sub-divide large pieces of information about tree removal (e.g. reasons for removal are split into the six main causes)*

Questions about organisational features are an area that needs particular focus for centres – learners must be taught to make specific reference to the texts in their answers.

Question 3 required learners to answer this question: Section 2 states that there has been a 20% increase in tree removal over the past decade. Where was this information taken from? The majority of learners were able to answer this correctly.

Question 4 asked learners to identify a group of people Weyton Council suggest would benefit from its plan to remove tree roots. Again, learners seemed to perform well in this question.

Question 5 targeted SoS 15 and asked learners to state the meaning of the word 'binding' in the context of the report. Answers to this were mixed. Some learners incorrectly used a straight





dictionary definition. The key to these questions is for learners to ensure their answers are rooted in the text. So the answer was: *compulsory/mandatory/final/cannot be challenged*.

Question 6 required learners to give two examples from the advert that demonstrated DTC's care for the environment. There were several correct potential options for this question and most learners were able to give at least one correct response.

Question 7 asked learners to provide an example of a fact and an opinion from Document 2. Answers to this question were mixed. Learners need to ensure that the answer they provide in these questions are clearly a fact OR an opinion and not a mixture of the two. For example, several learners said *Our workers are friendly and full-qualified*. This is a mix of fact (fully-qualified) and opinion (friendly).

Question 8 asked learners to state what problems relating to trees were illustrated by the images. Most learners were able to correctly pick out the issues.

Question 9 targeted SoS 14 and asked learners to give two examples of how the writer have given a very positive image of DTC. Examiners were looking form either descriptions or examples of the way the writer presented a positive image. These could have included:

- *e.g. beautiful land, we love them (or any example of emotive language)*
- *e.g. making roads safe for everyone, (making) a pleasant environment (or any example of positive effects language)*
- *e.g. we pride ourselves on our commitment, (our workers) know what they are doing (or any reference to personal experience)*
- *e.g. she will have the answer, we look forward to working with your council (or any example of personal appeal to readers)*

Some learners mistook this question to be about how the document was formatted. Some learners gave partially correct answers: *The writer has used language to reassure the reader of the company's professionalism and expertise. For example: the worker are friendly, considerate and fully qualified. The writer has provided a helpline number.* Here the first part was awarded 1 mark, but the second sentence gained no marks.

Question 10 asked learners to state what organisational feature the writer of Document 2 used to give examples of why trees need to be removed. Almost all learners correctly identified bullet points.

Question 11 required learners to give two words that best described the tone of one of the letters in Document 3. Not many learners scored both of the available marks for this question. They seemed to struggle with the concept of tone. The correct answer was: Angry / Frustrated/ Annoyed /





Relieved / Sarcastic or any other valid tone. Incorrect answers included *informative/descriptive/pleased*.

Question 12 targeted SoS 13 and the use of inference and asked learners to say what Harri Singh was implying by writing that DTC ‘sound good on paper’? Two marks were available and correct answers were: *The DTC workers may be good in theory but not in practice* OR *DTC workers are supposed to be ‘good’ but they make a noise early each morning* OR *What you read about DTC workers is not HS’s*. Not many learners gained both marks. Many learners gave more generic answers about DTC not being believable, which actually related to Document 2 and other letters on Document 3.

Question 13 required learners identify two concerns raised by one of the writers on Document 3. This appeared to be a more straightforward question and most learners correctly identified at least one of the concerns.

Question 14 required learners to give two reasons why one of the writers had used a number of rhetorical questions. Here almost every learner gave a generic answer about the use of rhetorical questions. Such answers were not awardable. Examiners were looking for:

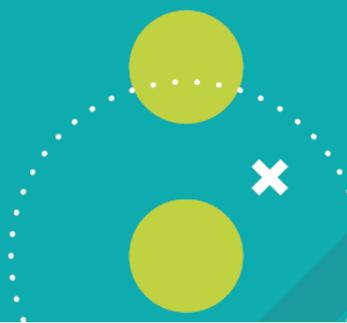
- *To introduce different aspects on the topic of urban trees*
- *To get the reader to engage with the topic of urban trees*

Or any valid response about the use of rhetorical question that rooted the answer in the text.

Question 15 required learners to compare the views expressed by Teresa Frank in Document 3 with the views expressed in Document 1, and how these views are conveyed. Weaker learners simply stated what the documents were about. To gain any marks in this question learners needed to have some mention of at least one view expressed by TF in Document 3 AND one of the views expressed in Document 1. 3 marks were awarded to answers that provided a clear and explicit comparison of views expressed by TF in Document 3 and Document 1 with examples from both sources. These answers gave a clear comparison of how views were conveyed in both documents (eg the use of quotations, exclamation marks and personal experience by TF in Doc 3 and statistics, processes and formal language in Doc 1).

Question 16 asked learners to analyse **all three** documents and explain which was the **most** biased. They were asked to provide examples from all three documents to support their decision. Responses to this question were especially weak across the cohort. Some learners said a document was the most biased with no explanation. Others described the bias in each document, but failed to answer the question. Up to four marks are available for this answer. To gain full





marks examiners were looking for responses with a clear choice that considered all three documents in detail with comprehensive explanation, supported by examples.

Advice to centres for Level 2 Reading

SoS 12

Learners must read the question carefully to ensure they are comparing information from the documents they are told to. In their answers they should make clear to which document they are referring. They should also consider information from all the documents the question requires of them. Comparison should be explicit. Learners scoring higher marks on these questions are able to compare both information and ideas backed up with evidence from the relevant texts.

SoS 14

Learners need to understand what textual features and devices and to explain how they are used specifically in the text they have read. Learners should be taught to tackle this in different ways. For example, they may be asked to identify two techniques used by a writer to: persuade/argue/ explain etc, or they may be given a section of text and asked to identify the textual feature or device. They might also be presented with a section of text and be asked why it has been used.

SoS 16

Most learners were able to say what organisational features were. Some were able to identify but not explain why they had been used in the text. For example, when explaining why bullet points have been used in a document, the answer must directly relate to the text. So: *to list things* would not gain marks, whereas *'to list the instructions so the reader knows how to find the office'* would be awardable. Organisational features may include images, bullet points, numbered lists, headings and subheadings and so on.

SoS 17

This SoS is a new demand at RFS Level 2. Learners will usually be asked to analyse all three documents for a specific purpose: to say which is the least formal, most biased and so on. Learners must make a choice supported with information from the texts. For high marks, answers should give a detailed consideration of all three documents with examples. Many learners are simply outlining the content of each document in answer to this question. These sorts of responses are unlikely to contain any awardable content and are unlikely to gain marks.

SoS 19

This SoS is also new demand at RFS Level 2. Learners need to be taught about styles of writing and should be able to use this information to identify different styles of writing.





Closing comments

Centres should ensure that learners are being submitted for assessment at the correct level. Some learners in this cohort were operating at a level far below that expected at Level 2 and really struggled with the assessments, many left entire sections unanswered.

Chief Examiner: Jayne Garner
Date: January 2020

