Chief Examiner Report for Functional Skills English: Reading

NCFE Functional Skills Qualification in English at Level 1 – 603/5058/1
NCFE Functional Skills Qualification in English at Level 2 – 603/5054/4

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Generic Overview

It was pleasing that most learners engaged with the texts in these assessments and were able to obtain some relevant information. However, once again 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 remained weak, for Level 2 it is still notably 12, 14, 16, 17 and 19. For Level 1 SoS 10, 12, 14, 15, and 18 remain the areas that need particular attention.

Level 1

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.

Most learners were able to gain marks in straightforward questions for SoS 9. Similarly, in a multiple-choice question that required learners to state the main purpose of Document 1, most were able to do this successfully.
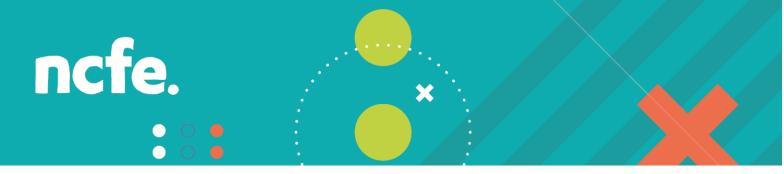
Most learners did well in a question that required learners to state whether two statements from the document were a fact or an opinion. Some very weak learners did not answer this question. With a 50:50 chance of getting a correct answer, I would advise centres to encourage all learners to provide one of the options given in these boxes.

In a question that targeted SoS 12 which asked learners to identify the language features from extracts of the texts. It was clear from the vast majority of responses that many learners did not understand language features. Only a small minority of learners gained full marks in this question. Many responses tried to explain the meaning of the excerpts. This remains an area that needs particular focus from centres.

Similarly in questions about organisational features most learners gave 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 find out more information*
b) *to tell you what's in the picture*

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.

In a question that targeted SoS 15 learners were asked to infer meaning from an image. Answers that simply stated what was in the photograph did not gain marks. 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 questions that targeted SoS 18 and the use of punctuation most learners gave a very generic response along the lines of 'to give extra information that isn't necessary' or to separate lists. These types of answers are generic and fail to demonstrate that the learner has read the text. Learners must directly refer to the text in these questions in order to access marks.

The final question asked learners to compare the information, ideas and opinions given in Document 1 with 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.

Advice to centres for Level 1 Reading

SoS 12
Many learners do not understand 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
Once again, answers to these questions were very mixed. It is not enough to give a generic answer about organisational features. Learners need to be able to both identify the features and explain why they have been used in a specific text. Organisational features may include images, bullet points, numbered lists, headings and subheadings and so on.

SoS 15
Once again, many learners just stated what the picture was in answer to these questions. These questions are about inference. So learners must to relate the image to the text and answer the specific question asked rather than describe what the image is.

SoS 18
If answers to these questions do not directly relate to the texts, marks cannot be given. 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 number of people living in Manchester* would be awardable.

Level 2

Most learners attempted to answer the majority of questions. However, some learners left numerous questions unanswered, particularly the last two questions. 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.

As with Level 1, many learners gave generic answers in questions about the use of organisational features. For example, while the majority of learners were able to give a generic answer about the use of subheadings, 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*
b)   *to inform the reader what is in the next paragraph*

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.

In questions that required learners to give two examples of what could be inferred extracts of the texts, unsuccessful learners simply lifted sections from the quotation and failed to give a true inference.

Answers to questions about giving examples of facts and opinions 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. Some learners incorrectly gave an opinion as a fact or vice versa.

Many learners struggled to give a correct answer when asked to describe the tone of the writing.

It seemed that only high scoring learners were able to explain the use of language features with direct reference to the text. If learners simply explain what, for example, rule of three is, without reference to the text, they will not be awarded marks.

Question 15 required learners to compare the views expressed by one of the contributors to Document 2 with the views expressed in Document 3, 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 in Document 2 AND one of the views expressed in Document 3. Three marks were awarded to answers that provided a clear and explicit comparison of views expressed in these documents with examples from both sources which gave a clear comparison of how views were conveyed in both documents.

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 often fail to make clear to which document they are referring. Learners should also consider information from the documents the question requires of them. Some learners are making basic errors by comparing the wrong texts. Comparison should be explicit.

SoS 14
Learners need to understand what textual features and devices are and to explain how they are used specifically with reference to the text they have read. Learners need to be able 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
Again, the key to success for this SoS is for learners to ensure their answers are clearly rooted in the text they have read. Most learners can identify organisational features, but giving a generic answer about their use will not gain marks. 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 to make them easy to read* would not gain marks, whereas '*to list the instructions so the reader knows how to register their opinion'* would be awardable. Organisational features may include images, bullet points, numbered lists, headings and subheadings and so on.

SoS 17
Weak learners are simply stating 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. For high marks, answers must give a detailed consideration of all three documents in answer to the question, with clear examples.

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