Chief Examiner Report for Functional Skills Maths

NCFE Functional Skills Qualification in Maths at Level 1 – 501/2325/7
NCFE Functional Skills Qualification in Maths at Level 2 – 501/2324/5

August 2018

Level 1

Errors are often seen with final displays of money, with responses frequently not shown to two decimals, especially if the figure ends with a zero, i.e. £1.5 instead of £1.50 and with the subtraction of time.

Practical problems with length, weight and capacity are often seen with incorrect metric conversions, inconsistent units or lack of familiarity in applying the appropriate approaches or methods to tackle the problem. Converting within metric units and the necessity to work with consistent units, is a common area that requires development. Such errors can affect solving problems as well as calculating a correct area or perimeter. Area and perimeter responses often share the common theme of being mixed up, i.e. a perimeter calculation for an area task and an area calculation for a perimeter task.

Likewise, it is not uncommon to see where a learner has calculated a mean average at a task requesting range and calculated range at a mean average task. Unfortunately, learners can lose marks in 2 tasks if this occurs. Another set of tasks that involve mix ups are area and perimeter, and this may lose as many as 4 marks if an area is calculated instead of a perimeter and vice versa.

Within Handling Data, there is evidence that probability identification and expression is improving, however, this is still an area of concern overall.

The identification of information from tables and graphs involving whole numbers generally shows proficiency. However, displays of information often indicate lack of familiarity with pie charts and graphs especially in the labeling and completion of a scale on the axis when requested.

Identifying amounts from tables and graphs, or identifying amounts from task information, for ratio values and fraction values, would appear to indicate that further practice for learners preparing for assessment would be of benefit.

Similarly, ratio use still appears to be a challenging area for many learners. Identifying fraction and percentage amounts often shows establishment, whilst equivalencies between fractions, decimals and percentages often appears to be challenge for many, particularly where it is evident that the learner does not have a sound understanding of the underpinning skills.

Level 2

Use of appropriate checking procedures - many learners merely repeat an original calculation instead of using a reverse or an alternative calculation. There are some learners who have completed accurate checks and included comments as to the relevance of their checks whilst some learners do not complete any checks

and this on occasions has made the difference for some learners between achieving and not achieving. Some learners do not recognise that an answer may be totally wrong and the use of a check can identify this allowing them to revisit the original question.

Some learners still tend to be somewhat careless with units – either omitting them or performing incorrect conversions between different metric units, examples of such misconceptions include 100 metres being equivalent to a kilometre and a litre is equal to 100 millilitres. On occasion these errors occur in work from otherwise capable learners where there has been accurate calculations and processes but with final conversion error.

Common with past years, a small but significant proportion of less able candidates are still insecure working with area and volume. This usually manifests itself in the area of compound shapes being calculated as the product of three lengths. Tasks which involve both area and volume together tended to be poorly answered with some confusion seen between perimeter and area.

A number of candidates lose credit needlessly by not taking note of key command phases such as:

- "Show how ..."

- "Support your answer"

- "Explain by ...."

- "Make it clear how you arrive at your estimate"

- "Explain how you decide"

These phrases indicate that more than a worked answer is required, and fulfills the Level 2 Skill Standards of Interpret and communicate solutions to multi-stage practical problems in familiar and unfamiliar contexts and situations, and Draw conclusions and provide mathematical justifications. Again, marks are often not awarded due to the lack of explanation of justification of learners' choices or responses.

Generic Overview

Learners need to be adequately prepared prior to being entered for an assessment. There have been many examples seen where learners were evidently not at the level being assessed, with some very low marks being awarded on occasions and sometimes no work seen that justified any marks at all across the whole assessment. In several cases learners had not even provided responses to some of the simpler tasks such as identifying information from a table or chart or identifying the correct calculation to use. Learners also need to be confident in their underpinning skills and have the ability to transfer the necessary skills to a range of tasks. We recommend that all learners sit the Forksills initial/diagnostic assessments, so that all learners can be entered onto the correct level.

Learners need to ensure that they show all working out, even if they initially make an error as marks may be awarded for part answers or correct calculations seen in working as well as selecting relevant information from tables or charts.

The use of the suite of resources available on the NCFE Qualhub will support this preparation considerably for all learners. This includes sample assessments, resources, powerpoints and activity sheets that can be used in teaching environments or as self-directed study.

Overcoming an area

The two specific points to raise are as follows:

Evidence of working out and checking of answers seems to be the most common area where marks are not awarded and learners need to be supported and encouraged to make sure that this is demonstrated in their assessment responses.

Learners also need to ensure that they indicate what units their final answers are in, i.e. cm, m, km, as this is often an area where marks may not be awarded.

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