**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**

**January 2019**

**Introduction**

There has been considerable variation in the responses seen in the assessments at both levels. Some learners were clearly capable of completing the tasks in the assessments to a high standard resulting in achievement of the qualification with a high assessment mark, and in some cases with 100%. Some learners were clearly not at the level being assessed and this was evident in the marks then awarded.

In addition, some learners achieved the assessment by achieving the pass mark but with weak underpinning skills, this was evident in some of the responses to the tasks attempted. Likewise some learners were very close to achieving the assessment, but only didn’t by one mark and in some of these cases it was errors in either final answers or through not checking their calculations when requested.

There are common themes seen in the errors in assessments at both levels and these are detailed below.

**Level 1**

Evidence seen in learners’ assessments often indicated errors in the use of money, with responses frequently not shown to two decimals and incorrect money notation, i.e. omitting the zero when dealing with pence less than 10, i.e. £27.50 often seen as £27.5

Practical problems involving length, weight and capacity are often seen with incorrectly calculated conversions including converting within metric units and the necessity to work with consistent units is a commonly seen area of difficulty.

There were also inconsistencies seen in the use of units or lack of familiarity in applying the appropriate approaches or methods to tackle the problem.

Area and perimeter responses were often mixed up, i.e. an area calculation for a perimeter task and a perimeter calculation for an area 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

Within Handling Data, there is evidence that probability identification and expression is improving, however, this is still an area where errors are often seen.

The identification of information from tables and graphs involving whole numbers is generally completed well although tasks involving the completion with pie charts and graphs often indicates difficulties.

Identifying amounts from tables and graphs, or identifying amounts from task information, for ratio tasks, has been generally evidenced well, although not all answers have been shown in their simplest form so on some occasions this has resulted in learners not being awarded marks.

**Level 2**

There are several areas where learners were regularly not awarded marks at both levels and this included:

The use of appropriate checking procedures - many learners had merely repeated their original calculations, when they should be demonstrating evidence of checking their original calculation and answers through using a reverse or an alternative calculation. For some learners this made the difference between achieving and not achieving the assessment. Some learners had completed accurate checks and included comments regarding the relevance of their checks, whereas some learners had not attempted this at all.

In some examples learners did not recognise that an answer was totally incorrect and the use of a check could have enabled them to identify this. They could have revisited the original question to have the opportunity to obtain additional marks.

In addition learners need to ensure that the full check method including the working out is shown; merely writing, “I did the sum backwards” or “I did a reverse calculation” or “I used a calculator” do not demonstrate the accuracy of the original calculation.

On occasion some learners had tended to be somewhat inaccurate in the use of units – either they had omitted the units, even when prompted to show their units or had completed incorrect conversions between different metric unit: examples such as a kilometre being 100 metres and a litre being 100 millilitres. Errors in conversion of volume units were often seen with the misconception that a volume of 10000cm³ being divided by 100 to obtain m³. In addition errors in the conversion of time from a decimal value to hours and minutes were regularly seen.

On some occasions these errors were seen in work from otherwise capable learners where evidence was seen of accurate calculations and processes but with final conversion errors.

In common with previous years, a small but significant proportion of less able candidates showed difficulties when working with area, perimeter and volume. This often appeared as calculation of the area of compound shapes being calculated as the product of three lengths and tasks that involved area and volume together tended to be poorly answered with confusion often seen between the use of perimeter and area.

Several candidates were not awarded marks as it appeared that they had not read the question correctly and did not take note of key phrases such as:

“show how ...”, “support your answer”, “explain by ....”, the use of such phrases should indicate to the learner that more than a worked answer is required, i.e. an explanation of their answer such as a comparison between two values is required. This then fulfills the Level 2 Skill Standards of “Interpret and communicate solutions to multi-stage practical problems in familiar and unfamiliar contexts and situations” as well as “Draw conclusions and provide mathematical justifications”. Again on many occasions learners are often not awarded marks due to the lack of explanation or justification of learners’ choices or responses from their calculations.

**Generic Overview:**

All learners should be given ample opportunity to practice the required skills as stated in the assessment specifications and this can include the use of sample assessment scripts with associated mark schemes which can be found on the NCFE website. There is also a full suite of resources which includes PowerPoints, learner revision sheets, activity and answer sheets as well as learner checklists for both levels.

Learners should have the ability to practice the differing skills in a range of tasks and this practice will support their development of transferable skills. Learners should also have the opportunity to apply the required skills to a variety of familiar and non-familiar tasks.

Errors at the initial stages of tasks are common and may be as a result of learners not ensuring that they have taken care in reading the task instructions. Learners should be supported to read questions more than once and in the case of paper based assessments could be encouraged to underline of highlight key information.

Errors have been seen in identifying dimensions, for example: internal volume or in calculations involving compound shapes with missing measurements being incorrectly calculated.

Learners should also be encouraged to attempt all tasks as marks may sometimes be awarded for the correct method seen even when incorrect values are used and also marks may be awarded for follow through, where an incorrectly calculated value has subsequently been used with the correct following process or method.

Similarly, care in presenting information is important. Displays of calculations and approaches, both on-line or paper based, were generally clear and sufficient and in some cases resulted in marks being awarded where full marks were not achieved. However, there were some examples seen where learners had only given a final answer without any evidence being seen of calculations. This meant that if the learner’s answer was incorrect, then no part marks could have been awarded and for some learners this made the difference again between achieving and not achieving.

In other examples, purely for paper-based assessments, learners’ handwriting was poor and on rare occasions it was extremely difficult to decipher what working out a learner had shown. Some examples were also seen of learners completing the assessments in pencil, which again sometimes made it difficult, if final answers were incorrect, to award part marks for correct values or methods used. Learners should be completing such assessments in pen at all times.

Additionally, I would recommend that practice using checking or final answers is incorporated within preparation for their final assessment with the intention to increase learners’ familiarity of a range of tasks and to reduce the amount of no responses to check requests.

I would also recommend that learners are encouraged to return to the task’s instructions after completion of a task check that their final answer is displayed in as requested in the task instructions; for example: to 1 or 2 decimal places; with appropriate units showing area as m2 or m sq/squared/square or with an appropriate comment/ comparison or conclusion.

Further advice and guidance including the aforementioned suite of resources that can support learners at all levels can be found at:

[**www.ncfe.org.uk**](http://www.ncfe.org.uk)

**Email: service@ncfe.org.uk**

**Call: 0191 239 8000**

There are also a number of Common Learner Error Videos, and Overcoming Learner Error Videos which can be found at:

[**https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL05CIlRfHw9jh4n5ChWeVdVtEkm4A1P0Y**](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL05CIlRfHw9jh4n5ChWeVdVtEkm4A1P0Y)

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