Chief Examiner's Report

Functional Skills English Reading

Level 1 (4748)

4748-110 (e-volve)

4748-210 (paper-based)

Version 1.3

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide centres with feedback on the performance of candidates for 4748-110 and 4748-210 Functional Skills English Reading Level 1. This report covers the period from February 2023 and August 2023.

2. Overall performance

This report covers the period from February 2023 and August 2023.

Pass rates remain high, and the majority of candidates who pass are able to demonstrate a good level of achievement across all the Subject Content Statements.

Time management does not appear to be an issue for most candidates, as most exam papers contain answers to all questions. However, on occasion, some weaker candidates do not enter answers for some questions, often the final two, which require candidates to compare information from both source documents.

Other issues apparent for some weaker candidates include not reading the questions carefully enough. Questions generally specify the number of responses required, but this seems to be missed by some candidates. Other questions will direct candidates to specific parts of the source documents from which answers must be taken. If answers are provided from other areas of the text, they are unlikely to be awarded marks.

The topics presented to candidates seem to be engaging and facilitate the demonstration of the requisite skills at Level 1. This suggests that most candidates have completed comprehensive learning programmes that include familiarisation with both the Subject Content Statements and the types and styles of questions that they are likely to be presented with prior to being entered for the exam. However, it is apparent that some candidates are entered into the exam without the necessary period of learning and familiarisation with question types having taken place.

For successful candidates, no single Subject Content Statement (SCS) stands out as being particularly problematic. However, some consistencies can be seen across weaker candidates' papers. These include answering questions addressing the following Subject Content Statements:

SCS 10: *Compare information, ideas and opinions in different texts*

SCS 11: *Identify meanings in texts and distinguish between fact and opinion*

SCS 12: *Recognise that language and other textual features can be varied to suit different audiences and purposes*

SCS 16: *Recognise vocabulary typically associated with specific types and purpose of texts (e.g. formal, informal, instructional, descriptive, explanatory and persuasive).*

3. Areas for development

1. Questions should be read very carefully.

It is important that this is stressed to learners, and that they have practice in reading and understanding sample questions prior to the final exam.

A typical instruction that is missed is to take answers from specific areas of the text. For example, a question may ask a learner to read a particular paragraph or to compare information given in specific paragraphs from two different sources. This can apply to questions addressing any and all of the Subject Content Statements, so it is imperative that candidates take note of instructions in the questions at all times If answers are taken from elsewhere, it is very unlikely that any marks will be awarded.

2. Number of responses required

Most questions will state the number of responses required. If it is not explicitly mentioned, as a general rule, the number of marks allocated to a question is a good indication of the number of responses required.

Multiple-choice questions will always indicate the number of selections required, and this can vary between 1 and 4, so once again it is imperative that candidates pay particular attention to the directions in the questions.

Similarly, if a question asks candidates for **one** response, candidates should write only one response. If the question asks for **two** responses, candidates should write down two responses and no more. If more than the required number of responses are written down, the examiners will mark only the first one or two responses, as dictated by the question, or on other occasions, if stipulated in the mark scheme, award zero marks.

3. Word or phrase questions

Candidates should also take note of the wording in questions regarding the requirement to write down a word or a phrase. If a single word is asked for, candidates should write only one word. If a phrase is asked for, candidates should write the appropriate phrase, not the entire sentence the phrase comes from. The examiner needs to have confidence that the candidate has demonstrated the appropriate skill through being able to pick out the salient word or phrase.

4. Subject Content Statement 10: *Compare information, ideas and opinions in different texts.*

Candidates may be asked to find areas of agreement or disagreement between the two documents, or to provide a contrasting statement from one document to a given statement from the other document, or whether a particular subject is covered in only one or both documents, for example. The questions themselves may be multiple-choice format or open format.

In order to access full marks for an open question, a candidate must explicitly compare and/or contrast the information. Simply listing the information from both documents, without an explicit attempt to compare or contrast (as demanded by the question), will not allow the candidate to obtain full marks.

Candidates should be taught about the use of discourse markers, some of the more common ones being *however, in contrast, similarly, both documents, but*, etc.

It is also important that candidates carefully read what it is that they are expected to compare or contrast. Candidates may be directed to particular paragraphs, titles, subheadings or specific phrases. Failure to refer to the correct part of the source documents will result in the loss of all marks for that question.

5. Subject Content Statement 11: *Identify meanings in texts and distinguish between fact and opinion.*

Candidates should be aware of how facts and opinions are presented, and how certain terms can render a phrase as an opinion. They should also be able to recognise that opinions are sometimes presented as facts, even though they are opinions.

Some candidates, when asked to identify an opinion(s) from a specific paragraph, respond with their own opinion on the topic; this is not what is being asked. Candidates should be identifying a phrase or sentence from the paragraph that is an opinion.

A typical question will ask candidates to identify either facts or opinions within a specific paragraph. It is important that candidates limit their answers to specific parts of the paragraph so that it is clear to examiners that candidates are able to correctly identify the relevant fact or opinion. It is usual for paragraphs to contain both facts and opinions, so simply writing out large chunks of text is unlikely to provide confidence to the examiner that the candidate is able to accurately isolate either facts or opinions.

6. *Subject Content Statement 12: Recognise that language and other textual features can be varied to suit different audiences and purposes.*

Candidates should understand that authors make choices about the language they use and combine these choices with other textual features in order to more effectively convey their meaning and address their intended audience. For example, a promotional source document will use techniques such as persuasive language or direct address to the reader, amongst many other possible techniques.

Candidates are tested on their ability to recognise how language has been adapted and used in various ways. These can include asking about the overall style of writing, asking for examples of specific words or phrases that are characteristic of a style or purpose, asking what the intended effect is of using certain words, or asking about other textual features, such as the use of questions and answers, commands, quotes from experts, direct address, emotive language, humour, rhyme, urgency, excitement, etc.

It is important, therefore, that candidates are able to understand the purpose of a piece of writing and to know the intended audience, and to be able to think how the writing has been adapted accordingly. Typical purposes of source documents at Level 1 include to persuade, to explain, to promote, to instruct, to describe and to narrate. Candidates should be exposed to many documents with different purposes and understand how language has been selected and adapted to meet the purpose.

Once again, it is important that candidates read the questions carefully, as they may be directed to look only at specific areas of the text.

7. Subject Content Statement 13: *Use reference materials and appropriate strategies (e.g. using knowledge of different word types) for a range of purposes, including to find the meaning of words.*

The nature and format of the questions assessing this aspect of the standards will vary from paper to paper, but, in general, the source documents will contain some additional information in the form of a table, a chart, a footnote, or another similar device that provides information not specifically mentioned in the body of the text. Questions are designed to require candidates to answer using this additional information.

Centres are reminded that candidates should have access to a dictionary for Functional Skills Reading exams.

8. Subject Content Statement 14: *Understand organisational and structural features and use them to locate relevant information (e.g. index, menus, subheadings, paragraphs) in a range of straightforward texts.*

Candidates need to be taught to recognise how organisational and structural elements within a text aid the reader to access and understand the text and to locate specific, additional information. For example, paragraphs donate a change in topic and help to split up the text to make it more accessible to the reader. Subheadings are used to pre-empt or summarise the information below the subheading. Asterisks and superscript numerals are instructions to a reader to look elsewhere in the text for additional information. A typical question might ask for a piece of information that can be found through recognising the correct subheading, following an asterisk or superscript numeral, reading a caption or using some other organisational or structural feature.

9. Subject Content Statement 15: *Infer from images meanings not explicit in the accompanying text.*

On occasion, it was apparent that candidates were not using the image to find information, despite the instruction to do so in the question. The Subject Content Statement specifies that information that candidates must infer information that is not explicitly mentioned in the text; therefore, any responses that quote the text are likely to be incorrect.

10. Subject Content Statement 16: *Recognise vocabulary typically associated with specific types and purpose of texts (e.g. formal, informal, instructional, descriptive, explanatory and persuasive).*

Candidates are typically asked about the purpose of a document and how the language has been used to suit that purpose. They may also be asked to identify particular words or phrases that are characteristic of the purpose. It is important, therefore, that candidates are familiar with the different purposes of texts they are likely to encounter; these include to persuade, to explain, to describe, to instruct, to narrate, to inform, to entertain, etc.

Centres are also reminded that if a question requires the identification of a single word, only one word should be written in the response. Similarly, if the question requires the identification of a phrase, only the phrase, not a complete sentence, should be written as the response.

11. Subject Content Statement 17: *Read and understand a range of specialist words in context.*

It is always possible to deduce the meaning of the word through a careful reading of the text. Candidates may be asked the specific meaning of the specialist word, or alternatively, to identify which specialist word has paraphrased in the question. The question could be either a multiple-choice question or an open question.

Centres are reminded that candidates should have access to a dictionary for Functional Skills Reading exams.

12. Subject Content Statement 18: *Use knowledge of punctuation to aid understanding of straightforward texts.*

Candidates should know and understand the roles of common punctuation marks, including commas, exclamation marks, speech marks, inverted commas, brackets, dashes, capital letters, question marks, and so on. A typical question may ask a candidate to identify which punctuation mark has been used to show a quotation, to indicate additional information, or to separate items in a list, for example. Alternatively, they may be asked why a particular punctuation mark has been used. Once again, the questions may be multiple-choice or open questions.

4. Advice for centres

1. Candidates should only be entered into the exam once sufficient learning has taken place. In order to maximise the chances of success, candidates should have previously made use of sample papers and model answers, as these will not only give an indication of their progress but will also ensure they are familiar with the types of question that may be asked.

2. An updated Guidance for Delivery document is available on the City & Guilds website. This is essential reading for all tutors or other support staff involved in the delivery of Functional Skills English, as it provides further detail about the Subject Content Statements, examples of the types of questions that may be asked and sample teaching activities.

3. Spelling, punctuation and grammar are not tested in the examination, and there is no requirement for candidates to write in complete sentences, nor to repeat the stem of the question in the response.

4. Centres are strongly urged to refer to the previous Chief Examiner's Reports, as the information and advice contained within the report are still applicable.

5. Learning should include sessions on exam technique. For example, candidates should know how to recognise the salient points of a question, how to interpret what is being asked, should understand how many responses are required, how many marks are allocated to the question, how to check responses for accuracy and sense, and how to manage time effectively.

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