



FUNCTIONAL SKILLS

ENGLISH LEVEL 1

8720/S/R/W

Report on the Examination

8720

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8720/S

Please note that this report covers the Spoken English component for Functional Skills English for both Level 1 (8720) and Level 2 (8725)

Introduction

A number of centres took the opportunity to enter this round of submissions. For most centres it was straightforward to verify their work.

Most centres used the newly designed Candidate Record Form (CRF) date 2022/3. This has been amended in the following ways:

- It no longer requires a student signature
- In the section on Presentation teachers are required to give the title of the student's presentation and then add some comments on their assessment of it
- The Discussion section is more clearly set out

Use of this form is now compulsory, as is the requirement to comment on the assessment of the presentation. A number of centres omitted to do this.

Overall this new form is working well and makes it clear to teachers that students need to fulfil all the criteria from 3.1 to 3.8 to be awarded a pass.

Continued improvement was seen in the range of topic students covered, and in the improved quality of questions, especially from teachers.

In each of these reports key problems are highlighted, and the three mentioned below were also mentioned in the November report. It would be really helpful if these issues could be addressed immediately by centres.

The first is that too many students read their presentation, without any attempt to engage with their audience. If this is the case in Level 1 then teachers must question the students at length and in depth for all criteria to be fulfilled. If it happens at Level 2, which is a higher standard with more rigorous requirements then the centre should deem the student(s) not ready to be entered. The student(s) should then be taught how to deliver a presentation, addressing an audience directly while still using supporting material where necessary.

The second problem area is an administrative one and involves the labelling of files on the submitted USBs. Some centres used their own labelling system which was unhelpful. Please follow the AQA guidance on naming audio visual files. At the very least your verifier needs to see the candidate number and the student's surname. It can be an impossible task for a verifier to find the student they need to look at if there is merely a list of first names, or even worse a random set of numbers.

The third issue involves seeking an exemption from filming in what should be a few and highly specific cases – after all a filmed presentation is a requirement of the specification, and this component forms part of the subject as a whole. Centres must understand it is not possible to seek an exemption from filming *after* they have already given the student a pass. The exemption must be sought before submitting a grade and the CRF must provide detailed description of the student's presentation. In some cases centres had not approached AQA at all, and simply wrote to

the verifier (who is not on the AQA staff) saying why they had given the exemptions themselves - this cannot happen.

Please note that submissions on CD/DVD can no longer be accepted.

Below are key aspects of the specification which have appeared in previous reports and are reproduced here as key facts for teachers and exam officers who may be new to the specification or need reminders.

The nature of the component

The spoken component is an integral part of the Functional Skills package called English. Along with Reading and Writing it is a required element, and the subject as a whole cannot be passed without it. As part of the component there are two activities that must be completed. These involve giving a presentation and taking part in a discussion. These are separate assessments. Failure to do both of these, and equally importantly failure to *evidence* these, means the student cannot pass.

For a presentation there must be a video recording, plus a completion of the presentation part of the record form, with comment on the performance. For a discussion there must be a completion of the discussion part of the record form.

Each of the activities has a sub set of skills that must be delivered for a pass. These are listed on the record form, and all of them must be achieved. This is called a mastery model of assessment, so even one cross in the 'no' column means that the student must fail, or probably more appropriately be entered at a later date. For example, if a student is not asked any questions after their presentation, or does not answer them, then they cannot be awarded a pass.

What follows below is a reminder of the systematic steps that need to be followed.

In advance of submission of entry and grades

1. During the Functional English course students should regularly take part in presentations with questions and in discussions. The questions should, at least in part, be from teachers/adults and should be designed to ensure that students can reach the required criteria. There is guidance in section 5 of the specification.

2. When preparing for/practising presentations, students must be discouraged from reading verbatim notes or PowerPoints. Students should be speaking on a suitable topic of their own choice.

3. Teachers should collect evidence which will be a video recording of a presentation for each student in the sample to be submitted and notes on the discussions to be entered on the AQA CRF.

If there are specific reasons that make it impossible to conduct visual recordings then exemptions must be sought from AQA well in advance of the submission deadline and before any grades are submitted.

The Candidate Record form should be completed at the time of the activity. This will indicate to the teacher whether the student has fulfilled all criteria, and is ready to be entered, or whether the student needs further opportunities and needs to be entered at a later date.

4. When students are entered, the centre must already have collected the evidence that will allow them to give the student a Pass. This means they must have fulfilled **all** the criteria for both presenting and discussing. To ensure that you are familiar with the required standards (which for 8725 are obviously higher than for 8720) please watch the AQA standardisation videos, which are available via the AQA website.

Only those teachers who have followed the standardising procedures should be awarding passes.

Please **do not** enter students if you do not have the required evidence to do so. The negotiations that are required with centres to support belatedly what they awarded earlier can be very time-consuming and can lead to many withdrawals of students at the last minute.

5. So to summarise: *collect the evidence; complete the paperwork; check that all standards have been met by looking at criteria and watching standardisation videos; enter the student; wait to forward the evidence to the verifier.*

A check list of what is required once you are asked to submit your evidence for verification.

6. Check that you are submitting the required sample size, that each student's presentation is on a separate clearly labelled file on a USB and that 8720 are separated from 8725.

7. Check that the files play on windows media player, on a computer. Check that visuals can be seen and that sound can be heard.

8. Do not compress files and crucially do not encrypt with passwords known only to you. AQA does not require encryption. If you do, then please use the official password supplied by AQA.

9. Check that you have completed and forwarded a CDS and a CRF form for each student in the sample. Double check that every student you have entered as Pass is shown to have fulfilled all the criteria on the CRFs.

10. Have all materials ready for verification by the deadline.

11. When notified of your verifier the sample should be posted to the verifier using first class post (fully paid) and without the need for a signature. It is helpful if the centre submits a short piece of correspondence to the verifier, making it clear what centre is sending the materials and which specification is being entered.

Conclusion

The very best talks are those where students talk about often unusual and very challenging experiences, which are then teased out for their implications by subtle and sensitive questioning.

Many teachers had worked very hard with their students and their efforts are much appreciated.

[AQA | Non-exam assessment \(NEA\) | Standardisation | Teacher online standardisation \(T-OLS\)](#)

[AQA | Notes and guidance: non exam assessment \(NEA\)](#)

[Centre Declaration sheet 2023](#)

[Candidate Record Form 2023](#)

[Functional Skills English Specification for first teaching in 2019 \(aqa.org.uk\)](#)

8720/R

We began 2023 with a series of sources on the general theme of makeup. Source A was a news story about a female pupil falling foul of the school's restrictions on makeup – a scenario which may be familiar to many students. Source B was an extract from a podcast about makeup for men and Source C a factsheet for prospective makeup artists. There was a pleasing level of engagement with the materials and questions with very few departures from focus despite the potential for strong differences of opinion, particularly on Source B.

Qs 1, 4 and 15, tick box style, ask students to identify which statements are true and which false, thereby testing close reading and comprehension. In terms of attaining the full two marks Q1 was particularly successful at just over 55% with Q4 and Q15 at around 38%. Unfortunately, the proportion achieving zero marks was higher than usual at 15% for Q1 and 23% for Q4 and Q15.

The main error in Q1 rested on a failure to recognise that "*Demi Stansted missed two days of lessons*" was a correct paraphrase of "*Demi walked out of school after being removed from lessons for a second day*". The most common error in Q4 was a misunderstanding of "*The Principal of Hilton Valley Academy said Demi's makeup was inappropriate*" as True when the source actually reported the Principal's comment to be "*It would be inappropriate to comment on individual students*". Significant numbers of entrants also confused "*13-year-old Demi Stansted*" with "*Demi Stansted is in Y13*". In Q15 a large number of students did not recognise the difference between Egyptian pharaohs and Egyptian gods and incorrectly selected "*Makeup was worn by Egyptian gods*" as True.

Q16, the test of fact and opinion, also in tick-box style, was reasonably well-answered with full-mark rates a little over 50% and just over one-fifth failing to achieve any marks. The most bewildering error was categorising "*A junior makeup artist can earn £45 for a ten-hour day*" as an opinion.

For all the tick box questions, the instruction is "*put a tick (✓)*". Unfortunately, too many students choose to ignore this and utilise a variety of symbols, such as circles, dots, dashes, the letter V; diagonal lines which fill the entire box or a mixture of ticks and crosses according to whether they are selecting T or F. Some even write the full words in the chosen box, which is simply wasting time. Whilst examiners are directed to award the mark if the symbol is in the correct box, this is a functional test, which includes the ability to follow instructions. Despite previous comments in these reports, significant numbers of students continue to tick only one or two of the four boxes and immediately condemn themselves to zero marks. If they tick only two boxes, they will get zero, even if both these choices are correct. This could be easily fixed in classrooms. Please remind students that **they must attempt every box**.

Qs 2, 5 and 13 are the dictionary questions. "*Alternative*" and "*paramount*" had very pleasing success rates of 92% and 82% respectively with "*chastised*" lagging behind somewhat on 72%. Whilst these figures show encouraging progress in students' capabilities, there is still considerable way to go until all entrants can provide such evidence. Only Q13 had a not-attempted rate just above 1%, presumably owing to time pressures as the examination progressed.

Practice in developing dictionary skill could usefully form part of future lessons. It would also be worthwhile teaching students that alternative definitions sometimes appear and to look for the numerals which would indicate this. When students try to change an answer by overwriting, it can be difficult to discern which letter they wish to submit as their final answer. Please advise students not to overwrite, but clearly cross out and write the alternative next to the crossed out response. It is perfectly acceptable to write a second-attempt answer outside the box, in the cause of clarity,

however, two letters presented in the form of “A or C” will result in loss of the mark. There was also evidence of some good practice in students clearly eliminating some of the possibilities and working through the options systematically, which was very pleasing to see.

Q3: This series, Q3 tested punctuation and required students to identify the correct reason for the capital letters in the word *Principal* (of the academy). Just over 60% correctly recognised that this was used to indicate his job title, the main incorrect selection being “*To show that he’s an important person*”.

Qs 7.1 and 7.2 asked for a positive and negative thing people say about men wearing makeup in modern times. Both parts enjoyed similar success rates in the 60% range and identical non-attempted rates of 2.5%. Where students failed to secure the mark in Q7.1 it was largely owing to offering a generic response such as “*There are many male beauty products*”. There was a greater variety of incorrect answers in Q7.2, the most common being the omission of the word “*too*” from the correct answer “*Can make a man too feminine*”. Considerable numbers of students also selected “*Victorian men could be imprisoned for wearing face powder*” presumably because they found this interesting and highly surprising; unfortunately it does not meet the specific requirement of “*in modern times*” stated in the question.

Whilst we attempt to give Level 1 students the benefit of the doubt in regard to the way responses are expressed, students should be advised that only their first attempt will be acceptable. What is being assessed here is the ability to “*identify and understand the main points, ideas and details in texts*”. “*Identify*” means “select” and it cannot be right that some students are rewarded for copying several points into the space meant for one point and sometimes arriving at a right answer only by the second or third attempt. Furthermore, inclusion of a positive and a negative **in the same answer** is likely to invalidate the mark. Students should be advised to choose **one positive** and **one negative** only and put each of these into the relevant space.

Q9 was the picture question in this series. Students were presented with a photograph of David Beckham gazing at an array of beauty products on a dressing table with a mirror. Almost 70% were able to correctly identify that the picture suggested “*Some famous men are not embarrassed to wear makeup,*” while the main incorrect selection was “*There are many men’s beauty products available*”. The question clearly asks for something readers learn from the picture which they cannot elicit from the text; therefore it should have been easy to eliminate this incorrect answer from the statement in Source B “*Today there are many male beauty products*”.

Q10 which asks for two similarities between Source A and B was somewhat less successful than in November with just under 40% achieving two marks and 15% gaining no marks. The simplest way to gain two marks in this series was to say “*Both sources are about makeup and both contain a picture (of makeup)*”. However, whilst “*both sources contain a picture*” generally gains a mark, students should be advised that the safest way is to say at least one thing about the overall subject matter, since the sources are chosen to be thematically linked. Certainly, guessing that both sources may contain a title, image, sub-headings etc is an unnecessary risk. In this case, answers such as “*Both sources are about makeup*” and “*Both sources refer to someone being punished for wearing makeup*” would have been perfect.

Q11 Although less successful than Q10, the other half of the comparison question – identify two differences – showed a marked improvement over the November series. Just over one-fifth gained the full two marks and around 35% scored zero, almost 5% of whom did not attempt the question. A significant number of students have clearly been taught that there is a virtually guaranteed mark for those who remember to check the front of the insert to see the correct definition of the text

types, such that “*Source A is a news article / story and Source B is a podcast*” was a common submission. There were also a significant number of responses identifying the gender difference – “*One source talks about a girl wearing makeup and the other talks about men’s makeup*”. It is heartening to see this improvement which offers solid ground on which to build.

At the simplest level, comparison of the content of the pictures (if there are two of them of course!) would be fruitful, but checking for precise differences in content should also be encouraged. There are often pleasing and encouraging glimpses of perceptive comments on the sources but sadly lacking in the ability to draw a valid comparison between the two. It might be useful to advise students that the starting point needs to be to think about the similarity and then try to identify differences which arise from the similarity (which they have, hopefully, already identified in Q10). For example, “*Both sources have people making comments but Source A contains online comments from different people while Source B has a comment from a man who wears makeup .*” This should steer students away from simply making a comment about each source independently.

The following guidance, reproduced from previous reports, remains valid.

- Advise students to look at the front of the insert, which clearly identifies the text type and this is a completely acceptable way to secure a valid difference.
- Students need to be specific in the points they make so steering them away from the type of generic comments which plagued Q8 responses in the legacy specification would be advisable. Responses such as “*Both texts use paragraphs*” or “*Source A is a webpage and Source B / the other one isn’t*” will not be rewarded. The latter comment simply points out that the sources are different, which the question already indicates. Students need to say what the difference is. Students should also be advised to avoid unrelated pronouns.
- Comments which are not comparing like with like are sometimes offered: “*Source A uses sub-headings and Source B is a podcast*”, for example.
- Finally, pictures. One of the sources will always contain a picture, in order to deliver the relevant scope of study descriptor assessment. There is no guarantee that both sources will contain an image so the pre-planned response referred to above must be avoided. If both sources do contain an image, students will be able to gain a mark for identifying this in **Q10**. If only one source contains a picture, this will not form a valid route for a mark in **Q11**. However, if both sources contain an image, a mark can be gained in **Q11** by identifying a difference in the content of the pictures: “*Source A has a picture of a schoolgirl wearing eyeliner; Source B has a photograph of a famous man looking at makeup*”.

Q17: After reading Source C – a factsheet about careers in makeup – students were asked to list the tasks a makeup artist might be required to carry out. This was a relatively straightforward undertaking requiring close reading and accurate selection of what constituted “*tasks*”. Almost 17% achieved full marks but just over one-fifth received no marks, plus a further 5% who did not attempt the question. Lack of success principally lay in selecting general summative information about working as a makeup artist, such as “*ensuring that performers have suitable makeup for appearing in front of cameras*” rather than specifics such as “*applying makeup*”, “*fitting wigs*” or information about working hours and pay etc. Even a cursory reading of the text should have highlighted the sub-heading which read “*Tasks & Duties*” under which all the relevant information could be found.

It would be helpful to remind students that this is a functional test: reading the question and complying with its precise requirements are important elements of the assessment.

This is the highest tariff question on the paper and it is clear that a number of students arrive here depleted in terms of time and/or energy and lack focus and motivation. There is no reason why Source C and its 10 marks of questions could not be attempted first, thus completing Q17 while still relatively fresh.

Despite the shortcomings noted above, it is pleasing to report that the mean mark this series was perfectly in line with that in November and was achieved by almost 63% of entrants. This indicates that performance is relatively stable and if improvements could be achieved by focusing on the areas identified here, more students could achieve similar success.

As we slowly return to a post-Covid world of exams and assessments, it is gratifying to see how hard Functional Skills students and teachers have continued to work throughout the disruption of the past couple of years to achieve their results. There are clear signs of improvement in a number of areas, for which credit must go to the tireless, resilient teachers who labour unceasingly on behalf of their students. Many congratulations to all those students who successfully demonstrated the results of those efforts and learning.

8720/W

Overview

This is the twelfth series under the reformed Functional Skills in English specification, Level 1 Writing (8720W). Although there is still some disruption to education due to the Coronavirus it would appear that the trend is now more positive in terms of entries and this January series confirmed this.

The 2011 standards have now been superseded by 'scope of study' descriptors which apply to Writing Composition and Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar (SPG). These can now be found on page 9 of the AQA Specification <https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/resources/english/specifications/AQA-8720-8725-SP-2019.PDF>.

At Level 1 learners are required to produce straightforward texts such as narratives, instructions, explanations and reports of varying lengths. Each writing task will require learners to address one of the above categories although it is important to note that narratives and explanations can be embedded within different formats such as emails, blogs, letters, reviews etc

The reformed qualification is intended to maintain very high standards and a pass at this level will be a strong indicator of ability in writing Standard English. It is consistent in its standard as a test of basic English writing skills and will be the foundation for secure progression. With the current demands of GCSE English, many schools and colleges are considering alternative routes for students who are seriously stretched. This qualification would also serve as a suitable alternative and an excellent progression route from The Entry Level Certificate (Step Up to English). It is important that schools and colleges enable students to have a realistic chance of acquiring valuable qualifications by mapping abilities against available qualifications. In this way, the reformed Functional English will provide important opportunities for both centres and students.

To ensure continuity under the reformed specification the writing papers have retained two questions. Each contains stimulus material leading into a task which is supported by bullet points, enabling students to use some of the information in the question. There is an element of problem solving and functional thinking in completing each task. A significant innovation is that there are word limits established for Question 1, which will have an impact on the achievement of students and this is looked at in more detail below. The time allocated for the paper is now 1 hour with an advisory 20 minutes for the 1st question. The total mark available for the paper has been increased to 27, with 9 marks for Question 1 (6 for composition, 3 for SPaG) and 18 marks for Question 2 (9 for composition, 9 for SPaG). An important point to note is that SPaG comprises 44% of total marks, an increase of 4% over the previous specification, reflecting its importance at this level. Mark schemes for both questions are now skill based and will remain unchanged for the lifetime of the specification and can be found at: <https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/resources/english/AQA-87202-SMS.PDF>

At this level, centres now very rarely enter students who have little or no chance of getting inside the middle level of Mark Scheme descriptors. In this series, though the entry was modest, students seemed generally confident and able to meet the requirements of the questions with almost 90% of students gaining a mark of 10 or more while over approximately 47% gained a mark of 18 or more, figures which fall in line closely with the November series. These figures are very encouraging. In the circumstances, students achieving a mark of 18 are well suited to the demands of Level 2 and should be encouraged to progress. Students whose marks fall below a total of 18 need a little more in the way of skill development before they progress to Level 2. Close examination of the centre's mark profile would be very useful in establishing appropriate progression routes for students.

Question 1

This question asked students to email a party organising company with instructions about a forthcoming party for someone special. The question clearly fell into the category of 'instruction' although other modes of writing would be involved. At standardising, it was clear that the task offered no barrier to completion and students were able to gain the marks that their achievement merited. The panel did not have to take into account any significant variant interpretation of the question. The fact that the question echoed examples from earlier series may have helped here.

Students were asked to write between 80 and 120 words. It is important to understand that the length of answers is clearly addressed in the mark scheme and that marginal infringements of this aspect of the question would not deny a student access to the highest band provided the standard of writing composition justified it. As the time advised for this question is only 20 minutes, students who spent too long and wrote too much may have been doubly disadvantaged. Overall, although it is not possible to provide definitive figures, most students met the requirements of word length for this question. The nature of this question allowed for perfectly valid answers that were close to, or just above, the lower word limit. Some of these answers fulfilled the requirements of the question to a very high standard. Excessively long answers were self-penalising as they lost focus and clarity while very short answers, below 50 words or so, were unlikely to achieve marks above the bottom level (1-2 marks).

Most students saw the task very clearly. They presented a situation which BuzzParty were able to address with some instructions as to how to do so. Very few students missed the task and it was clear that most had been well prepared for a clearly transactional piece of writing.

Answers in the top band for composition (5-6 marks) presented very clear outlines of the context of their party. The first aspect that students addressed was the identity of the person on whose behalf the party was being arranged. As the question's focus was on 'someone special', students in this band selected family or friends although a small minority selected a person whose work or life deserved recognition. One student wanted to organise a party for local nurses while others looked at sports stars. However, in the main, the choice was clearly someone close to the student. Students would then establish the need for the party, whether birthday or otherwise. Location, date and time were also included. All of this relevant information underpinned the clear instructions that were required for the best answers. Many students adopted the themed party approach and the instructions linked closely to the theme, for example the request to provide a cake which somehow reflected the cartoon game Among Us. Instructions about balloons, music, food, party games etc were provided with clear limits in terms of numbers and time. The best answers also instructed BuzzParty to provide costings.

It is often the case that the language found in the better answers was able to reflect the content more effectively than that in weaker answers. The use of specific vocabulary such as 'include an array of multi-coloured balloons', 'deeply appreciate' or 'charge for the services' were found in excellent answers. Sentences were varied and sometimes complex, again adding to the impact of the response. The use of lexical markers to indicate the instructional mode were also very evident in these answers in phrases such as: 'I will need...', 'would it be possible...', 'commencing at...' etc.

Answers in the middle band for content (3-4 marks) often just about met minimum standards in terms of length but were clearly able to engage with the task in terms of audience and purpose. Key elements of the instructions were present in these answers, such as food selection and the number of guests. Because of issues around length these answers tended to have a more generalised quality and there was a sense that the student had not fully identified to the reader the party they were planning.

The very weakest answers, in the bottom band were almost invariably too short, with students unable to provide much beyond reference to a party. Answers in the bottom band were often incoherent with vocabulary alone (without clear sentences and grammatical structure) providing the only basis for the reader to grasp meaning. Some students simply listed a number of features without any real grammatical structure to link the features together. While such answers were usually on topic they remained very much at the 'attempt' level with little awareness of purpose. Fewer than 6% of students fell into this band which shows how well centres are able to match their students to an appropriate level in Functional Skills in English.

Before leaving Question 1, it is important to remember that it carries a maximum of only 9 marks (including SPG) and it is recommended that students spend no more than 20 minutes answering it. Students who spend too long on this question are putting themselves at a serious disadvantage because they are losing time on Question 2 which is worth twice as many marks. Also, it is extremely unlikely that the maximum mark for Question 1 would deliver a pass for the student, but this is not true for Question 2.

Question 2

This question was very general in scope with a view to tapping into the personal experience of students. It was clearly a question in the 'narrative' category. Students were asked to write a story about when they helped somebody or were themselves helped by another person. The stimulus material was worded in such a way as to provide confidence to students to write fluently. There were no specific requirements that needed to be taken into consideration and the panel of examiners found only a very tiny number of answers that were not really relevant to the task

Nearly all students were able to produce narrative writing of some sort ranging from the detailed and complex to the more mundane.

In the top band for composition (7-9 marks), answers covered a vast range of content and a good proportion of these answers dealt with issues around mental health and self-worth. These answers were generally those in which the student received the help. One example was that of a student who had been anxious about progress in school and had begun to avoid classes and other students in school. The student went on to depict the way in which one particular fellow student had made the effort to befriend the writer. The answer was a very well-constructed narrative with an introduction allowing for some context leading into a well-depicted series of events drawing to a final paragraph that offered a sense of closure. Some of the more interesting and entertaining answers were written from the point of view of the student, offering help to another person. Often these stories took the form of chance (or 'random') meetings in which the narrator felt an inner drive to provide assistance. One such answer depicted an incident in a supermarket where the narrator approached an old lady who was clearly struggling to manage herself. The intervention was gratefully accepted and even led to the establishment of a friendly relationship with the old lady. It was interesting also to note that many of these stories involved homeless people who were presented with sympathy and understanding.

One of the key descriptors for the top level is: 'Sentence structures, including complex sentences, convey meaning clearly'. This is often a determinant of a good mark as detailed, developed content can be delivered only through such a range of sentences. Simple, single clause sentences simply do not carry the information and ideas in a way that enables full understanding. In this series, for those students who were able to reach this standard, the quality of the language identified their answers and reflected their content very effectively. Sentences such as 'It was when we were

walking along the bread aisle that we saw a small, old lady, staggering with the weight of the shopping trolley and desperately trying to move it out of people's way' provide clear evidence of effective language use in the top band.

Answers in middle level (marks 4-6) offered some relevant material, but there was evidence of a lack of depth and confidence and occasionally credibility in the answers. Answers in this band also tended to reflect the interests and personality of the writer, so there were answers which dealt with kindness towards animals for instance, or stories that showed kindness within limited narrative horizons. Nevertheless, in all cases in this band, the students were focused on acts of generosity and purpose was evident.

As with Question 1, the weakest answers, in the 1-3 level were often extremely brief and the student failed to provide significant information, detail or logical sequence to sustain a narrative that met the needs of the task. The barest elements of narrative structure were present and the sentence structure was weak. In this series, some 84% so of students were above this level and this was an improvement on the previous series. A worrying 7% or so of students failed to attempt the question.

Students should be advised that this question carries 18 marks and should therefore be given enough time to gain as many of these marks as possible. There was clear evidence, in a large number of answers, that the students had not spent sufficient time on this answer in either planning or writing.

SPG

Spelling: at the top level students used specialist language effectively. Words and phrases such as 'themed', 'regarded', 'environment', 'commencing', 'selection', 'I would deeply appreciate' were spelt correctly. When ascribing a level to spelling it is not simply the correctness of the spelling that matters but the range and ambition of the vocabulary. At the bottom level, 'few examples of conventional spelling' is a key descriptor in the mark scheme. Phonetic spelling of common words was a evident throughout the lowest band answers; eg 'as' instead of 'has', 'couden' instead of 'couldn't'

Punctuation: sentence demarcation is the most significant issue in punctuation and answers in the top level displayed accuracy throughout. The omission of punctuation and poorly placed punctuation as evidenced particularly in comma-splicing are the two key weaknesses in the production of good sentences that can be read comfortably. Occasionally, more complex punctuation is used but not always accurately. In the middle level, sentence punctuation is accurate when sentences are straightforward. At the bottom level, sentence punctuation is either inaccurate, barely present or not present at all. A growing issue is the omission of apostrophes with personal pronouns, as in 'Im' or 'im' (sic). Another very common feature is the arbitrary use of upper case that may be linked to social media practices.

Grammar: At the bottom level a range of grammatical errors are found which makes reading very difficult. The main problems were:

- issues around tense especially shifting between past and present
- failure to use apostrophe in contracted forms
- omission of verbs in phrases which include the present participle, such as 'I visiting...'
- subject/verb agreement;
- lack of confidence in the use of passive voice
- the use of conjunctions or coherence markers;

lengthy sentences which lost the thread of meaning;

In middle and top levels the scale of grammatical inaccuracy varied considerably but the crucial indicator was the ability to follow what was written.

The final mark for spelling, punctuation and grammar takes into account achievement across the three elements.

In relation to performance, on Question 1, over 28% of answers were in the top level for SPaG, which was encouraging, while only 10% were in the bottom level, again a very strong performance.

On Question 2, approximately 24% of answers were in the top level with some 14% in the bottom level.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.