

# Principal Examiner's Report

## March 2011

FS

### Functional Skills English Writing Level 2

### E203

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Publications Code FC026897

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## **E203 - Functional Skills English, Writing Level 2**

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### **General comments**

This paper worked well in testing Level 2 Writing Skills. The subjects of the tasks set proved accessible to learners and the large majority produced some appropriate ideas for each task. However, there was a large variation in how clearly these ideas were expressed. Full range of marks was awarded in this series.

### **Task 1**

Most learners were able to understand the purpose of the letter and tried to persuade the bus company not to go ahead with the planned changes. The more successful learners developed their ideas beyond the stimulus text and organised their responses logically. Again, the more successful learners wrote persuasively, realising the need to make a rational case for maintaining the status quo. A significant number were able to sustain a rational argument written from another person's perspective, more often than not, that of an old age pensioner. Most learners also managed to write in an appropriately formal tone, with only a few lapses.

Letter format was still an issue for the large majority of learners, with very few managing a completely correct layout and an appropriate open and close. Common errors were to only include the recipient's address and to leave out the date. It was noted that this aspect of letter writing had improved from what was seen in earlier test series but was still not what is expected of Level 2 learners. The more successful learners wrote to a clear structure, with many using the bullet points provided to underpin their response. These learners were able to develop these points beyond simply repeating the stimulus text. A significant number, however, limited their response to a simple re-iteration. Less successful learners tended to have limited control of structure and their paragraphing was erratic, with a number writing in one sentence paragraphs and others writing the text in one continuous block. This has been noted in previous series and reflects learners who are not yet at Level 2.

Spelling, punctuation and grammar were variable in quality. Some responses were highly accurate, whereas others contained too many errors for meaning to be supported. Words commonly spelt incorrectly were: buses/grateful/appalling/connection/disappointed. There were also issues with non-capitalisation of proper nouns and incorrect sentencing in a number of responses. Some were written wholly in capital letters which makes assessment of the correct use of capital letters impossible and consequently lowering the mark for this section.

## **Task 2**

Most learners were able to attempt an appropriate tone for an email pointing out the inadequacies of a cycle shelter and there were a number of well written responses that were fully functional. These more successful learners developed ideas beyond the stimulus text giving precise details of the problems encountered and the actions they would like the Site Manager to take to rectify these problems. The majority adopted an appropriately formal tone in complaining, showing an awareness of audience, but a few saw it as an opportunity for invective and unrealistic threats, thereby losing functionality. This lack of appropriate tone, in some responses, has been noted in previous series and it needs underlining that an awareness of audience is vital to maintaining functionality in writing.

There were considerable variations in the opening and closing conventions of the email with some adopting a formal letter format and others using inappropriately informal salutations. Successful learners recognised the function of the email, opening and closing it in a way that was fit for purpose.

Again, many of the stronger learners used the bullet points in the task to add a logical structure to their response. Having described the shortcomings of the cycle shelter they then explained exactly what they would like the Site Manager to do about them.

In the majority of responses, spelling and grammar were sufficiently accurate not to impair meaning although punctuation was generally less secure. Common errors included missing possessive apostrophes and apostrophes used in plural nouns.

### **Recommendations for Centres**

This is a Functional Skills test, so learners will only be rewarded for writing responses that are fit for purpose, i.e. relevant to the task in hand. This means that learners must read the task and stimulus material with great care, before they start to write their response. Responses that are well written but of limited relevance to the task set will not receive a high mark for form, communication and purpose.

Prior to the test all learners should be given opportunities to practice writing in various formats, for different audiences and purposes. This experience will be of great help to them in tackling a future L2 Writing paper. This should include the differences in writing an email to friends or to a more formal contact.

It is also vital that learners are able to correctly format a formal letter, prior to taking this exam.

Centres should also reinforce the fact that 40% of the marks are for spelling, punctuation and grammar. It is important to remind learners that they are allowed to use a dictionary and also that they should spend a few minutes checking through their work, after they have finished. It is also important that learners understand where and when different punctuation marks should be used.

## Pass mark for E203 in March 2011

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Maximum mark	<b>25</b>
Pass mark	<b>16</b>
UMS mark	<b>6</b>

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Order Code FC026897 March 2011

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