

# Principal Examiner Report

October 2011

FS English Writing Level 2

E203

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## **General comments**

This paper worked well in testing Level 2 Writing Skills. The two tasks set were: writing a formal letter to a local councillor regarding the development of some land and an email of complaint to a hotel manager. These subjects 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 and the full range of marks was awarded.

### **Task 1**

Most learners were able to understand the purpose of the letter and make suggestions for the development of the land. They fully engaged with the task and wrote informed and quite lengthy responses. The stronger learners developed their ideas and were able to write logically and persuasively about their own ideas for the land development. These were realistic and well thought out responses that had a strong connection to broader community benefits. Less strong responses lacked this depth of understanding and reasoning and tended to repeat the suggestions mentioned in the question or adopt unrealistic and fanciful projects which compromised the letter's functionality. Some learners again compromised the functionality of the response through quoting imaginary statistics that bore no resemblance to reality, for example, "84% of people die playing game consoles", which was stated to support developing a Leisure Centre. Responses that were marginally functional tended to be repetitive around a limited range of ideas. Few learners missed the point entirely.

Many learners managed to write in an appropriate tone and were fully functional, with only a few lapses. The tone showed an awareness of audience and what is appropriate when addressing a councillor in a formal letter. There were, however, a few examples where the attempt to persuade had led the learner to threaten Mr Sagar with some dire consequences if their words were not heeded! These responses generally lost functionality. Others lost functionality in using expressions and vocabulary that were more appropriate for creative writing than a letter to their councillor.

Few learners were completely accurate with their letter layout although most included one address and an appropriate salutation and close. Stronger learners wrote to a clear and logical structure with good use of paragraphs and addressing the bullet points from the task. These were also able to write a range of sentence structures effectively helping the fluency of their letter. 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 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: their/there, weather/whether, you/use, centre/center, leisure/lesiure. There were also issues with non capitalisation of proper nouns and incorrect sentencing in a

number of responses. Some answers still were written solely in capitals compromising the correct use of capital letters. There were issues with sentence definition, especially using commas instead of full stops and vice versa.

## **Task2**

Most learners were able to attempt an appropriate tone for an email complaining about the writer's stay at the hotel. There were a number of well written responses that were fully functional and avoided the pitfalls of over embellishment of the hotel's atrocious conditions. These more successful learners developed ideas beyond the stimulus text giving a descriptive account of the shortcomings of the hotel and a clear request for satisfactory closure to their complaint. They adopted a suitably persuasive and polite tone recognising the intended audience and the need for constructive criticism rather than an emotive narrative of a nightmare stay. Some lost functionality in this area through indulging in dramatic scenarios which included bathrooms and toilets too filthy to use, indolent staff who completely ignored them, hot dishes served cold and raw and the "nearby shops" over one hundred miles away! There were a few answers that missed the point of the task and wrote an email about how the advertisement could be improved in ways, such as, informing people about the hotel décor.

Stronger responses demonstrated functionality through clear organisation and structure systematically describing the problems encountered but balancing these with some of the hotel's strengths and then clearly stating the action they would like the manager to take. As in the previous task, weaker responses tended to lose structure and were often repetitive or a list of complaints.

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. Increasingly in email responses learners are using "i" instead of "I".

### **Recommendations for Centres**

This is a Functional Skills test, so learners will only be rewarded for writing responses that are fit for purpose, ie relevant to the task in hand. This means that they 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. They should be clear about what is appropriate to include in an email of complaint. This is also true for other functional writing tasks which do require a good understanding of the nature of different audiences. This experience will be of great help to them in tackling a future Level 2 Writing paper.

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. Recent series have seen frequent misuse of possessive apostrophes in simple plural nouns e.g. noun's. Finally it is also recommended that centres tell learners that they can plan their work on the exam paper. They will just need to rule through this if they don't want it to be marked.

## Pass mark for E203 in October 2011

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

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