

# Senior Standards Verifier Report

2011 – 12

Functional Skills English

**Speaking, Listening & Communication**

**Levels 1 and 2**

E101

E201

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## **General Comments**

This has been an extremely successful year for English Functional Skills. The standards verification team have visited almost 300 centres nationwide.

The large majority of visits were very successful but there were some areas that caused some concern. Details of this follow below.

## **Learner Management**

The majority of centres have been using the correct Assessment Record Sheets and made them available for the Standards Verifier (SV) to sample. It is important that centres keep the Assessment Record Sheets (either electronically or in hard copy format) until the standards verification visit takes place.

In some situations, SVs reported that the sizes of groups were too large to assess sufficiently. It is recommended that during discussions the group size should be 3 to 5 in order for the assessment to be effectively carried out.

In a situation where centres have few entries, learners can be joined by their peers during the assessment – even if the peers are not being assessed – but the Assessor must **not** be actively involved with the discussion(s) or presentation.

Assessment Record Sheets were not always completed in enough detail. It is important that the task is outlined on the form and that the summative comment relating to learner performance is personalised and in some detail. The summative comment should explain and justify how a learner has met the assessment objectives.

Sometimes, the assessment times were too short for all assessment objectives to be observed. The total recommended time for each learner per level is 30 minutes but can be adjusted to allow sufficient time for learners to demonstrate their ability.

As Functional Skills is certificated and is an independent qualification, all areas must be assessed independently of any other qualification. For example, GCSE Assessment Record Sheets cannot be accepted as evidence for Functional Skills. The appropriate Functional Skills Assessment Record Sheets must be made available for the SV to scrutinise.

Blank Assessment Record Sheets for use in centres and exemplars of completed Assessment Record Sheets can be found in the Handbook for Quality Assurance.

## **Assessment**

The majority of SVs reported that national standards have been correctly applied for the vast majority of centres. During the visits, most centres had organised groups of learners for observation; however, it became apparent that some centres are not scheduling their assessments formally, but completing them ad-hoc. Centres are advised to schedule assessments so that learners engage with the task, realising the importance of it and that it is a formal assessment.

Some records had not been completed in enough detail and were often identical for all learners. Please see comments above relating the completion of Learner Assessment Records.

## **Internal Verification**

This is an area which has caused more concern than any other. It is vital that a Lead Internal Verifier (Lead IV) is appointed and Online Standardisation for Centre Assessors

(OSCA) training completed. This needs to be done every year and a Lead IV Declaration Form must be filled in and sent to [fsassessment@pearson.com](mailto:fsassessment@pearson.com)

The majority of follow-ups that were necessary were due to centres not having a Lead IV appointed or the OSCA registration having expired. Centres need to ensure that the Lead IV must renew their registration each year. Failure to do so will delay learners' certification.

Another issue that has arisen is that when Lead IVs leave a centre, a replacement member of staff needs to be appointed to this role and complete the required training. OSCA accreditation belongs to a Lead IV, not a centre. A new Lead IV Declaration Form must be completed and submitted.

New materials are made available for OSCA every year and these should not only be viewed by those who are registering as Lead IVs, but should be made accessible for all members of staff involved in the assessment of Speaking, Listening and Communication for Functional Skills. The recordings are valuable training materials and help to assure consistency throughout the assessment period.

Centres with few learners occasionally appointed the sole Assessor to be the Lead IV. This is unacceptable, as an Assessor cannot internally verify his or her own assessment decisions. One person needs to be nominated as a Lead IV and should monitor the Assessor(s) during the academic year. Where this proves impossible, centres are advised to work with another centre to assist with the internal verification.

Centres with various sites need to ensure that a Lead IV is registered and accredited for those sites which have a unique centre number. When undertaking the OSCA training and submitting the Lead IV Declaration Form, the Lead IV should list all the appropriate centre numbers the wish to be accredited for. In the situation with centres that have satellite centres, so long as the centre number is the same one Lead Internal Verifier can cover all sites.

It is essential that records are kept of when internal verification takes place or is scheduled for. Often, SVs reported that centres had not kept any records of Lead IV activities. Evidence of the Lead IV sampling of Assessment Record Sheets and other activities must be kept in order for an efficient standards verification to take place. Centres should adopt an active internal verification strategy to cover all Assessors, levels and locations. The Lead IV should provide advice and support to all Assessors and be able to identify the correct application of the assessment criteria. Assessors should be provided with feedback and the evidence should be kept for future scrutiny.

The Lead IV duties and responsibilities are detailed in the Handbook for Quality Assurance available on the FS English homepage [www.edexcel.com/fs](http://www.edexcel.com/fs). It is highly recommended that all members of staff involved with the assessment of Functional Skills have access to this guidance document.

## **Resources**

On the whole, most SVs reported that the ratio of learners to Assessors was appropriate although, as mentioned earlier, sometimes group sizes were too large in order to assess individual contributions sufficiently. Whole classes can act as an 'audience' for Level 2 presentations, but can be a distraction during assessed discussions. Those learners taking part in discussions should be provided with a suitable, quiet location which is free from outside distraction.

Learners should be encouraged to prepare fully for their assessments and can take notes in with them. It is important to add that presentations should not be read, although notes can be used as a prompt. Again, Assessors should not be involved with prompting learners or involved in the discussions.

Those learners who had prepared *PowerPoint* presentations were generally successful, but should avoid simply reading what is on the screen. Each slide should provide the learner with a prompt rather than a prepared answer.

A wide range of subject matter was observed by our SVs. Some commented specifically on successful tasks:

*"A particularly successful visit included presentations on learners' own portfolios, introducing their work, explaining why they'd chosen photography (or other) and then describing the next steps in courses/careers. I think that this is very functional and could be adapted to many vocational areas."*

*"The school gave learners a set of CVs for potential applicants for a new teacher at the school and asked them to debate the selection."*

*"I saw a good informal discussion where a group of young learners, all male, discussed their favourite football teams. They compared the skills of the players, the managers and the team's progress in the current league. The young men had a range of learning difficulties but the discussion worked well because it was a subject they all knew and enjoyed."*

Centres should be congratulated on the wide range of appropriate tasks employed.

### **Assessment Security and Administration**

Some SVs reported that centres did not always comply with all necessary assessment security and administration requirements.

The Examinations Officer should be made aware of when the assessments are to take place and the necessary signs and examination posters need to be clearly displayed.

Assessors are advised to ensure that learners have been entered for the correct level and are sufficiently prepared for the exam – this is appropriate for all areas of assessment. Initial Assessment Tool and exemplar materials are available online for both levels of assessment.

The Examinations Officer should keep a log of unusual incidents or suspected malpractice. Assessors and the Lead IV should inform the Examinations Officer of any concerns. During standards verification visits, some Assessors were not aware of the correct procedure.

Centres should also familiarise themselves with the 'Special Requirements and Arrangements' policy, which is available online to ensure that all learners are provided with the opportunities available to them.

The standards verification team have very much enjoyed visiting centres throughout the year.

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