

Functional Skills English Speaking, Listening and Communication Senior Standards Verifier Report 2016-2017

2016-17 was a busy and successful year for Pearson English Functional Skills Level 1 and Level 2. There were more than 300 Speaking, Listening and Communication verification visits from October 2016 to July 2017. There was also a successful pilot of postal sampling and this will continue in 2017-18. Standards Verification was a supportive process and also a check that national standards were being maintained.

The large majority of sampling outcomes were positive, with centres retaining direct claims status for the remainder of the academic year. Where there were issues, these tended to be caused by centres not understanding the sampling requirements, or not having the correct processes in place for assessment and/or verification. More details follow below.

Learner Management

It was clear from the visits carried out in 2016/17 that most centres understand the assessment process for Speaking and Listening and have robust systems in place for standardisation and verification. Activities chosen for assessments were engaging and generally closely related to learners' interests or other courses. Brexit was a popular and appropriate topic for discussion in 2016/17 and other successful topics included raising money for charity and the advantages of doing an apprenticeship. Presentations were generally related to learners' main courses and covered a huge range of areas.

Issues reported by Standards Verifiers included incorrect group sizes for discussion activities. It is a requirement that all group discussions should take place in groups of **three to five**. A group of two leads to a conversation and not a group discussion and groups of six or above make it too difficult for the assessor to accurately assess each learner. Very large groups disadvantage less confident learners who will struggle to make a sufficient contribution.

Another issue reported by Standards Verifiers is assessor involvement in discussion activities. Centres are reminded that assessors must not take part in group activities as their role is to assess the learners' contributions. It is also the case that where assessors take part in group discussions this makes it harder for the learners to meet the criteria. This is because the assessor tends to lead the discussion and this allows limited scope for learners to show that they have moved the discussion forward.

Where there are less than three learners who require assessment it is acceptable for centres to make up the numbers with a learner or colleague who is not being assessed. Members of teaching and support staff should not be used to make up the group numbers.

It is also not acceptable for learners at different levels to be assessed together as this will disadvantage both groups of learners. This means that Level 1 and Level 2 learners should not be assessed together and Entry Level learners should also not take part in Level 1 or Level 2 assessments.

The large majority of centres have been using the correct assessment forms and made these records available for the Standards Verifier to observe. It is essential that centres keep their assessment records for two years – either electronically or in hard copy format. By keeping these records, centres will be in a position to show the SV the records during the centre's next sample, which is usually once every three years or sooner if action points were set during the previous visit.

In most cases the Assessment Record Sheets (ARS) seen during sampling activity were completed fully and accurately. The guidance is that the comments should relate to an individual learner's performance on each task and explain how the learner has met the assessment objectives. It is recommended that the summative comments should be around 50 words in length. It is also necessary to include a learner's Pearson registration number on their Assessment Record Sheet.

Sometimes, the assessments were too short for all assessment objectives to be satisfactorily observed. At both levels the total assessment time must be approximately 30 minutes.

Assessment

Standards Verifiers reported that national standards were being correctly applied at the large majority of centres. It is essential that Standards Verifiers observe assessments, whether these are live or video recorded. The requirement for 2017/18 is that SVs must observe a minimum of **one** informal and **one** formal discussion at Level 1 and **one** formal discussion and **two** presentations at Level 2. Please see the 2017/18 *Quality Assurance Handbook* for full details on sampling requirements. If a SV is unable to view the full sample during a visit or postal sample, then this will result in action points being set and the centre will be 'blocked' until further evidence of assessment has been produced.

It is a requirement that assessments are scheduled formally and that learners know that they are being assessed. Centres must schedule assessments so that learners engage with the task, realise the importance of it and know that it is a formal assessment. Speaking, Listening and Communication assessments must be administered in line with the 2017/18 *Instructions for the Conduct of Examinations* document for Functional Skills.

Centres are required to make at least **two** video recordings of each activity at each level, prior to an SV visit or postal sample. The reason why two video recordings are required is to ensure that there is sufficient evidence for the SV to be able to make a decision on whether national standards are being maintained. Audio recordings are not acceptable as it is essential that learners can be seen as well as heard. It is also essential that the recordings are from the same academic year as the visit is taking place. Centres are required to provide SVs with the Assessment Record Sheets for the learners being assessed on the videos, including their centre registration numbers.

If a centre is unable to video learners due to safeguarding or security concerns then it will be necessary for the centre to apply for reasonable adjustments on behalf of its learners.

Internal Verification

All centres must appoint a Lead Internal Verifier who needs to complete OSCA training by **31st October** each year. Please refer to the Quality Assurance Handbook for full details on this process. The Lead IV cannot also be the main assessor.

After the Lead IV has completed the OSCA training the Centre Declaration Form *must* be completed and sent to svreports@pearson.com. If the Lead IV leaves the centre during the academic year then a replacement must be nominated who will also need to do the OSCA training and send an updated Declaration Form to svreports@pearson.com.

For centres that will be sampled in 2017/18 it is also a requirement for the Lead IV to send a Sampling Report Form (SRF) to their SV to ensure that the SV has all of the information they need prior to making a visit.

New materials are made available for OSCA every year and these should not only be observed by the Lead IV, but also be seen by all members of staff who are involved with the assessment of Speaking, Listening and Communication for Functional Skills Level 1 and Level 2. They are valuable training materials and should be used for standardisation each year.

Each centre, with a unique centre number, should have a nominated Lead IV. In the situation with centres that have satellite centres, so long as the centre number is the same one, the Lead IV can cover all sites.

It is essential that sampling plans are maintained detailing when internal verification has taken place or is scheduled for the future. Sampling should include observation of live assessment, as well as checking of Assessment Record Sheets. Often, SVs reported that centres had not kept any records of Lead Internal Verifier activities and thus there was no evidence that activity had been undertaken.

Centres must adopt an active IV strategy to cover all assessors, levels and locations. The Lead IV should be in a position to provide advice and support to all assessors and be able to identify the correct application of the assessment criteria. Assessors should be provided with some feedback and evidence of this should be kept for future scrutiny.

The OSCA and Lead IV registration process and duties are detailed in the Quality Assurance Handbook in an easy-to-use, step-by-step guide. It is highly recommended that all members of staff involved with the assessment of Functional Skills have access to this document and frequently refer to it throughout the assessment period.

Resources

Standards Verifiers reported that the ratio of learners to assessors was appropriate in the large majority of centres. The rooms used for assessments were also generally appropriate, although there were sometimes issues with background noise and sound quality, where activities were being video recorded. Centres must check that recordings are clear before sharing these with their SV. To make it clear who is speaking, it is also recommended that learners wear name badges and introduce themselves at the start of an activity.

A wide range of appropriate and interesting tasks were observed by SVs and centres should be congratulated on choosing tasks that created high levels of learner engagement.

When taking part in a discussion or presentation, it is acceptable for learners to use notes to support their contribution, but they cannot read out fully prepared contributions. Centres are also reminded that for the formal discussion it is expected that learners will have carried out research prior to the activity and that there will be evidence of this included in their contributions.

Assessment Security and Administration

A small number of centres sampled in 2016/17 did not comply with all necessary assessment security and administration requirements. Lead Internal Verifiers and tutors must all have a copy of the *Instructions for the Conduct of Examinations* (Functional Skills, 2017/18)

The examinations officer (or other member of staff responsible for examinations) should be made aware of when the assessments are to take place and the necessary signs and examination posters should be clearly displayed. The examinations officer should keep a log of unusual incidents or suspected malpractice.

Standards Verification

Standards Verifiers (SVs) contact centres as soon a centre has been allocated to them. In 2017/18 this is likely to be in November or December. Centres are urged to work closely with their SV and to ensure that all of the required evidence will be in place before a visit or postal sample. If circumstances change and it is necessary to change the date of a visit then it is essential to give as much notice as possible to the SV.

Once a visit or postal sample has taken place, the SV writes a report outlining their findings. Centres will receive a copy of their report within ten working days of a sample taking place.

During a visit, an SV may identify an action point for a specific area relating to the delivery and assessment of Functional Skills, Speaking, Listening and Communication. The SV will have informed the centre of the action point during the visit and it will be detailed on the report. Certification is withheld until the SV confirms that the action point has been addressed.

It is essential that if a centre has an action point on their report, they give it their urgent attention and advise their SV when the point has been actioned, so that the SV can advise FS Assessment and certification can be released.

Some reports contain improvement points. These are points where the SV has made a suggestion for continued improvement and development. Centres should act upon these recommendations and provide evidence of addressing them when the centre is re-visited in the future.

Summary of Key Points/Findings

Learner Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a requirement that during discussions the group size should be 3 to 5, in order for the assessment to be effectively assessed • Teaching and support staff must not participate in assessed activities • Summative comments should explain and justify how a learner has met the assessment objectives • All Assessment Record Sheets (ARS) for the previous two years must be made available for the Standards Verifier to scrutinise • The total length of the two assessed activities must be approximately 30 minutes at both Level 1 and Level 2
Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standards Verifiers (SV's) must be able to observe live or video-recorded assessments • The sampling requirements are the same for visits and postal samples • Assessments must be formally scheduled • All centres must video-record two of each activity at each level prior to an SV sample • Recordings of assessments must be from the same academic year as the visit taking place • Audio recordings must not be used as evidence • Centres must apply for reasonable adjustments if it is impossible to video-record learners
Internal Verification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OSCA training must be completed each academic year by appointed Lead Internal Verifier and the Centre Declaration Form submitted

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new centre declaration form must be completed and submitted when a Lead IV is replaced • OSCA materials should be seen by all members of staff who are involved with the assessment of Speaking, Listening and Communication • The Lead IV cannot also act as the main assessor • Centres should adopt an active IV strategy to cover all assessors, levels and locations • All Functional Skills staff to have access to the Quality Assurance Handbook
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notes can be used as a prompt for discussions and presentations, but learners must not read out a pre-prepared contribution
Assessment Security and Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The examinations officer should be made aware of when the assessments are to take place and the necessary signs and examination posters should be clearly displayed • The examinations officer should keep a log of unusual incidents or suspected malpractice
Standards verification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centres must work closely with their SV and notify him/her of any changes in circumstances • Action Points on SV reports must be given urgent attention and centres must advise their SV when the point has been actioned, so that certification can be released • Centres should act upon improvement points and provide evidence of addressing them when the centre is re-visited in the future

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