Functional Skills English Level 2

Mock Test 5

Total marks: 64

Pass mark: 38 out of 64

Time allowed: 2 hours

Reading 24 marks | Writing 40 marks | Total 64 marks | Time: 2 hours

You will need: pen, pencil, ruler, rubber. Dictionary allowed for Reading section.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Text 1 — News Report

University or Apprenticeship? The Debate Dividing a Generation

For decades, the path to a successful career seemed straightforward: get good GCSEs, complete A-levels, go to university. But rising tuition fees, a competitive graduate job market, and growing skills shortages have shattered that certainty. Today's school leavers face what many describe as the most complex career decision in a generation.

The numbers tell a striking story. The average graduate now leaves university with £45,000 of debt and enters a job market where 35% of graduates are employed in non-graduate roles five years after finishing. Meanwhile, higher apprenticeships — which combine paid work with study up to degree level — have grown by 58% since 2020, with starting salaries averaging £18,000 and no tuition debt.

Dr Rachel Okonkwo, a careers researcher at Warwick University, argues that "the binary choice between university and work is outdated. Higher apprenticeships offer the best of both worlds — but they remain poorly understood by parents who grew up in an era when apprenticeships meant manual trades only."

However, Professor David Ashworth of the Russell Group counters that "university provides something apprenticeships cannot: the intellectual breadth, critical thinking, and independent research skills that drive innovation. We risk creating a generation of technically competent workers who lack the capacity for abstract thought."

Social mobility complicates the picture further. Research by the Sutton Trust found that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are 40% less likely to secure competitive apprenticeships at top firms, suggesting the route may simply reproduce existing inequalities in a different form.

Source: The Independent online, April 2025

Text 2 — Apprenticeship Prospectus

Blackwood & Partners Accountancy — School Leaver Programme 2025

About Us — Blackwood & Partners is a mid-sized accountancy firm with 14 offices across the Midlands and South-East. We have been running our school leaver programme for 12 years, with a 94% retention rate and 78% of former apprentices now in senior positions.

What We Offer — A Level 7 Accountancy Apprenticeship (equivalent to a Master's degree) over 5 years. You will: earn a full salary from day one (Year 1: £19,500, rising annually), study for professional AAT and ACCA qualifications (all fees paid), work across three departments on a rotational basis, and receive a dedicated mentor throughout.

Entry Requirements — Minimum 5 GCSEs at grade 4–9 including English and Maths. A-levels welcomed but not required. We value: problem-solving ability, attention to detail, communication skills, and genuine interest in business and finance.

What a Typical Week Looks Like — Monday–Wednesday: client-facing work. Thursday: structured study day. Friday: professional development, team projects, or community volunteering. One Friday per month is a 'learning innovation day' where apprentices lead their own projects.

Support & Progression — Beyond your mentor: a peer support network of 45 current apprentices, quarterly progress reviews, fast-track promotion for high performers, and guaranteed interview for permanent senior roles upon completion. 92% of completers achieve their full qualification on first attempt.

How to Apply — Applications open 1 September 2025. Submit: online application form, one-minute video introduction, and attend an assessment centre (half-day). We guarantee feedback to all candidates within 14 days.

Text 3 — Online Comment Thread

RE: My daughter's school is pushing everyone toward uni. Anyone else frustrated?

Posted by: BuildersDad47 | 22 March 2025

My daughter is 16, predicted good grades, practical as anything, and her school careers advisor spent exactly four minutes with her before saying 'you should look at universities.' Four minutes. Didn't ask what she enjoys, what she's good at, nothing. Just ticked a box and moved on.

Meanwhile, my eldest lad did a plumbing apprenticeship three years ago. He's 21, earns £38,000, owns his own van, has zero debt, and gets called out by homeowners who spent three years at uni studying media and can't unblock their own sink. No disrespect to anyone — but let's stop pretending there's only one route to a decent life.

What drives me mad is the snobbery. His school literally had a 'wall of pride' showing students who got into uni. Nothing for apprenticeships. Nothing for kids who went into skilled work. As if plumbing, electrical, carpentry — the things that actually keep society functioning — are somehow less worthy of celebration.

My daughter wants to do a chartered surveyor apprenticeship. Degree-level qualification, paid from day one, no debt. Her head of year actually said: 'Are you sure? You're clever enough for university.' As if choosing an apprenticeship means you weren't clever enough. That attitude is the real problem.

Schools get measured on uni progression rates. That's what this is about. It's not about what's best for the kid. It's about what's best for the league table.

Section A — Reading

11 questions • 24 marks

Question 1 (1 mark)

According to Text 1, what percentage of graduates are employed in non-graduate roles five years after university?

- A) 35%
- B) 58%
- C) 40%
- D) 45%

Question 2 (2 marks)

Dr Okonkwo says higher apprenticeships are "poorly understood by parents." What reason does she give?

- A) Parents grew up in an era when apprenticeships meant manual trades only
- B) Parents did not receive proper careers advice themselves
- C) Parents cannot afford the fees involved
- D) Parents prefer their children to stay in education full-time

Question 3 (2 marks)

Professor Ashworth argues in favour of university. What specific skills does he say university develops?

- A) Intellectual breadth, critical thinking, and independent research skills
- B) Teamwork, time management, and IT skills
- C) Client-facing experience and professional qualifications
- D) Networking, leadership, and confidence

Question 4 (2 marks)

According to Text 2, what qualification level is the Blackwood apprenticeship equivalent to?

- A) A Master's degree (Level 7)
- B) A Bachelor's degree (Level 6)
- C) A-levels (Level 3)
- D) A diploma (Level 5)

Question 5 (2 marks)

Text 2 mentions several forms of support. Identify two specific support mechanisms beyond the dedicated mentor.

- A) A peer support network of 45 apprentices and quarterly progress reviews
- B) A company car and free meals
- C) A personal tutor and library access
- D) Weekly workshops and residential trips

Question 6 (2 marks)

In Text 3, the writer says his son gets called out by people "who spent three years at uni studying media and can't unblock their own sink." What effect does this have?

- A) It uses irony and humour to highlight the practical value of trade skills over academic qualifications
- B) It proves that media studies is a worthless degree
- C) It shows that plumbers earn more than everyone else
- D) It is intended as a serious insult to graduates

Question 7 (2 marks)

What is the purpose of "plumbing, electrical, carpentry — the things that actually keep society functioning" in Text 3?

- A) It elevates trade skills by emphasising their essential societal role, contrasting importance with lack of recognition
- B) It provides career suggestions
- C) It shows the writer is biased toward manual work
- D) It is a factual list with no persuasive purpose

Question 8 (3 marks)

Compare how Text 1 and Text 3 present the issue of bias against apprenticeships.

- A) Text 1 uses research evidence (Sutton Trust data, expert quotes) objectively; Text 3 uses personal anecdote and emotive examples ('wall of pride,' head of year's comment)
- B) Both texts present the issue identically
- C) Text 1 denies bias exists while Text 3 exaggerates it
- D) Neither text addresses bias

Question 9 (2 marks)

In Text 3, the writer ends: "It's not about what's best for the kid. It's about what's best for the league table." What structural technique is used?

- A) Parallel structure with contrasting content — the repeated pattern forces comparison between two motivations
- B) Alliteration used to make the ending memorable
- C) A rhetorical question that invites debate
- D) Repetition used simply for emphasis

Question 10 (3 marks)

How do Texts 1 and 2 differ in purpose and audience?

- A) Text 1 is a balanced news report for a general audience; Text 2 is a promotional prospectus designed to attract applicants
- B) Both are written for school leavers
- C) Text 1 promotes university while Text 2 promotes apprenticeships
- D) Both present balanced arguments

Question 11 (3 marks)

Using all three texts, evaluate whether apprenticeships are a genuine equal alternative to university, or whether barriers remain.

- A) Apprenticeships offer strong outcomes (Text 2) but barriers remain: social inequality (Text 1: Sutton Trust), institutional bias (Text 3: league tables), and cultural snobbery (Text 3: 'wall of pride'). Genuine alternative in theory but not yet equal in practice
- B) All three texts agree apprenticeships are now completely equal
- C) None of the texts see apprenticeships as viable
- D) Only financial factors prevent equality

Section B — Writing

Complete both writing tasks.

Writing Task 1 — Formal (24 marks)

Your local secondary school has invited former students to contribute to a careers information evening.

Write a formal article for the school newsletter explaining post-16 options (university, apprenticeships, other routes), discussing advantages and disadvantages of each, and offering practical advice.

Write approximately 300–400 words. Use an appropriate format for a formal newsletter article.

Writing Task 2 — Informal (16 marks)

Your younger sibling is finishing their GCSEs and is unsure whether to stay in sixth form or apply for an apprenticeship.

Write a message to your sibling giving honest advice, considering their strengths, and using a warm, encouraging tone appropriate for family.

Write approximately 200–250 words.