

Principal Examiners' Report November 2010

FS

Functional ICT Level 2 (FST02)

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FST01 - Functional ICT Level 2

Introduction

This was the first series of examinations for this specification. The paper was written to closely match the layout and the degree of difficulty of the sample assessment material. There were approximately 4900 entries for the qualification. The specification has some marked differences from the Pilot Functional Skills specification. It was felt by examiners that this was not always demonstrated in the work of the candidates. Some candidates seemed poorly prepared for the assessment.

It was a requirement that candidates had no further access to the internet or internet technologies after the first 15 minutes. However, there were several centres where this was evidently not adhered to. There were instances where candidates had used images from the internet for later tasks and where candidates had used online email account facilities - even in some cases where candidates were using their personal email accounts (often Hotmail or Gmail). This was accepted in this series but may be penalised in future series. Particularly worrying were examples where scripts indicated that candidates had emailed copies of their work to their own personal email account. This could result in a serious breach of the examination window's integrity and centres must ensure that candidates are fully aware of the serious consequences that could result.

Centres are strongly advised to read the Instructions for the Conduct of the Examination (ICE) document which can be downloaded from www.edexcel.com/fsict. This document should be read by the Examinations Officer, the ICT faculty staff and the network technicians, since it contains a wealth of guidance and information to enable them to deliver this examination successfully.

Many candidates did not appear to understand the instructions for collating their work, punching holes only in the top left hand corner, etc. with scripts appearing upside down and/or not in question number order. Candidates are prompted at the beginning and throughout the examination to enter their name, number and centre details before printing, yet many scripts showed handwritten details added after printing. This practice should be discouraged and candidates prepared properly for the examination so that they know how to add the relevant details in the header or footer of a document as required.

There were five tasks to be completed by candidates based on energy saving in an office environment.

Task 1

In Task 1, candidates were asked to search the internet to find out the cost of an energy monitor and two ways of saving electricity in the office. This information was then saved for later use in Task 3. They were required to list the sources used in document ResponsesNovL2, which was printed as part of their evidence.

The majority of candidates successfully provided some evidence that inferred the successful use of a search engine and multiple search criteria. However, it was approximately 50 percent of candidate that found the price for an energy monitor which should have been used in Task 3. A number of candidates misread the question and found information on saving energy relating to the home and not the office. Most candidates listed appropriate sources, but a few failed to print the evidence document as directed and so could not gain any marks.

Areas for improvement and development:

- using multiple search criteria
- reading the task thoroughly so that research is relevant
- saving the research to be used in a later task
- ensuring that all the required evidence is printed.

Task 2

In Task 2, candidates were presented with a spreadsheet which showed the average number of hours per day and days per months that a range of electrical equipment was used in a typical office. Candidates were required to calculate the average number of hours each piece of office equipment was used each day. They were also asked to calculate the total costs of electricity used in the office, to sort the monthly costs in descending order and, finally, to produce a chart showing the monthly cost for each item. At relevant stages, candidates were asked to format the spreadsheet and graph to make them clear and easy to read.

All candidates were able to open the spreadsheet and gained the mark for selecting suitable software. Although a significant number of candidates were able to calculate the average successfully by multiplying the data in column B by the data in column C; many used the =AVERAGE function. The majority of candidates were able to replicate the formula and gained this mark; however, this was allowed on 'follow-thought' from the data view since a considerable number of candidates did not evidence any formulae and provided only data view printouts.

Candidates were asked to apply a rating to the results of their calculations so that equipment was categorised as either HIGH or LOW according to the average number of hours used. This was subsequently used to calculate the average monthly cost. Very few candidates used either the =LOOKUP or =IF function. Many substituted in the actual value for HIGH or LOW which gained only 1 of the 2 marks available since the formula is not efficient. Very few candidates understood that they needed to calculate the total cost of electricity used. The majority of candidates were able to sort the data successfully, with very few not sorting it at all.

Most candidates were able to add some appropriate formatting to their spreadsheets; however, some did not bother at all. Some candidates used colour for shading and this was not always sensible or effective. Centres are reminded that there are no additional marks for the use of colour.

The majority of candidates successfully produced a bar chart to display the data; although some submitted a pie chart or a comparative chart. Very few charts had meaningful or sensible titles. Most used the title 'Monthly Cost' with no reference to electricity costs or office equipment. Few candidates labelled the axes. A significant number included unnecessary data on the chart in the form of labels or a legend duplicating an axis label or showing 'Series 1'. A common spelling mistake was 'equipment'. Some candidates did not select the correct data range, which resulted in an inaccurate chart and/or unnecessary data being included.

Areas for improvement and development:

- sensible formatting - use of gridlines, borders, shading
- sensible use of data types, e.g. currency
- using functions appropriately, e.g. =AVERAGE, =LOOKUP, =IF
- selecting the most appropriate form of chart or graph to display the data
- using relevant axes labels
- adding sensible and meaningful titles
- printing in formula view
- checking spelling.

Task 3

In Task 3, candidates were asked to create an A4 poster for use in the office, which would encourage people to save electricity. Candidates were asked to insert the text from the file PosterL2, the information saved from their research in Task 1, the chart from Task 2 and a suitable image from a given image bank.

All candidates successfully selected suitable software for the task, using either word-processing or desktop publishing software. However, many struggled with the title in that they had not understood that the poster was about saving energy in the office. Poster titles were often not clearly a title! A few candidates failed to include all the given text.

Although most candidates were able to indicate two sensible ways of saving electricity in an office, few included the cost of an energy monitor itself. Others lost marks because they suggested ways of saving energy in the home rather than an office. Most candidates included the chart they created in Task 2; but very few resized it appropriately and did not always place it next to the relevant text.

In general, candidates inserted an image into the poster; however, these were not always appropriate to an office environment, with many candidates choosing the pylons as opposed to a switch or piece of office equipment. Most images were sensibly sized and placed, although a few candidates did not maintain the proportions when resizing or cropped images inappropriately.

Candidates used fonts consistently, although they failed to resize them appropriately to create an impact, e.g. using headings and sub-headings. There was little evidence of formatting features being applied to add to the overall impact of the poster. Layout was often not balanced, with large areas of white space or too much information crammed in to the one side of A4.

The majority of candidates appeared to have checked their posters for accuracy with only a few spelling mistakes present that changed the meaning and, thus, impacted on the functionality of the product. However, there were a significant number who failed to produce posters that demonstrated a good sense of audience and purpose since many lacked sufficient information to encourage people in the office to save energy and electricity.

The majority of candidates failed to save the poster with a meaningful filename, instead calling the file just Poster.

Areas for improvement and development:

- using given text appropriately
- inserting and resizing evidence from other software applications
- selecting, inserting and resizing images sensibly for the given task
- using font size to create impact
- balancing the layout to make sensible use of white space
- checking for fitness for audience and purpose
- saving files with meaningful filenames.

Task 4

In Task 4 candidates were required to email their poster, as an attachment, to the office manager and cc the company accountant into the email.

Most candidates were able to access email software. It did seem, however, that some candidates had not been prepared for using email and attempted to reproduce an email layout in word processing software.

Most candidates were able to prepare a suitable email with the appropriate attachment. However, subject lines and messages were not always appropriate for a business setting with many candidates being far too familiar in a business context. A large number of candidates were also unable to copy accurately the email address. Whilst an unsuitable subject and inappropriate message detracts slightly from the functionality of an email, an incorrect email address renders the email useless. Screen shots of the email were often too small for the examiner to read without a magnifying glass. Many candidates added the 'Cc' recipient as additional address in the 'To' line.

It was disturbing that centres had not adhered to the instructions in the Instructions for the Conduct of Examinations (ICE) document. Many candidates obviously had access to the internet during this task since they were using online web based email accounts. Other candidates were using their normal school or personal email accounts. It was also noted that some candidates were copying their own personal email address into the email. This is a breach of the examination's integrity and must not be repeated in future series. It is imperative that in future series candidates should be set up with a dedicated examination email account which can be accessed offline - for example "Outlook Express".

Areas for improvement and development:

- accessing email software and accounts offline
- copying email addresses accurately
- using Cc appropriately
- using appropriate subject lines in an email
- using appropriate messages in an email
- producing screen shots which are of appropriate size to enable them to be read by examiners
- attaching files to an email.

Task 5

In Task 5, candidates were required to create a new folder for their poster, to move the poster into the new folder and produce a screen shot to evidence this.

They were also asked to give one reason for using a folder structure and to evidence this within the ResponseNovL2 document.

Most candidates who attempted this section created a new folder and showed in their screenshots that the poster file had been moved into it; with most having renamed the folder sensibly. Most candidates who gave a reason for using a folder structure mentioned organisation of data or ease of locating files.

However, it was noticeable that some candidates were using their normal home directories and had files and folders created outside the examination window. Centres need to ensure that for future examinations they set up dedicated examination user accounts which are accessible only during the examination.

Areas for improvement and development:

- creating a new folder
- naming folders appropriately
- producing a screen shot in which the text is legible
- making sure that screen shots are not cropped so much that important information is deleted.

Pass mark for FST02

Maximum mark	50
Pass mark	33
UMS mark	6

Note: Grade boundaries vary from year to year and from subject to subject, depending on the demands of the questions.

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