Principal Examiners' Report
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Functional Skills ICT Level 1 (FST01)

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FST01 – Functional Skills ICT Level 1

Introduction

This was the second 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 5000 entries for the qualification. The specification has some marked differences from the Pilot Functional Skills specification but the January paper reflected the standards of the November 2010 series. It was felt that some learners were 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 not adhered to, since there were instances where learners had used images from the internet for later tasks and where learners had used online email account facilities, in some cases learners were using their personal email accounts (often Hotmail or Googlemail). Particularly worrying were examples where scripts indicated that learners 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 learners 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 learners did not appear to understand the instructions for collating their work. The printouts were incorrectly hole punched, some pages were upside down and often not in task number order. Learners are prompted at the beginning and throughout the examination to enter their name, candidate number and centre details before printing, yet many scripts showed handwritten details added after printing. This practice should be discouraged and learners 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 learners; the background to which was the film Avatar at the 'Magivue' cinema.

Task 1
In this task the learners were asked to search the internet to locate the name of the director of the film 'Avatar'. The majority of the learners obtained appropriate information for the search, the name of the director of Avatar 'James Cameron' and were able to open the correct file ResponsesJanL1 and enter the required information.

Whilst the majority of learners were able to identify the relevant information there was a frequent lack of understanding of the requirement to produce a screen shot to show the search engine used to locate the information. Instead, many of the learners produced a screen shot of the website located as a result of the search.

A significant majority of learners scored at least 3 marks for this task. Marks were lost as a result of not providing a screen shot of the search engine used and not copying the website address into the ResponsesJanL1 document.

Areas for improvement and development:
• understanding the need for a screen shot of search criteria
• producing screen shots in which the key words used as search criteria are easy to read
• copying website addresses (not the search engine URL) accurately.

Task 2
In Task 2, learners were presented with a spreadsheet which contained figures for the number of people who visited the cinema in 2009. They were asked to add the number of people 'under 13' and the number of '13 and over' who went to the cinema in December and format the spreadsheet to make it clearer and easier to understand.   They were also asked to calculate the total number of people who went to the cinema each month and produce a chart to compare the total number of people who visited the cinema month to month.

Most learners entered the figure correctly in the spreadsheet and made a reasonable attempt at entering a formula to calculate the monthly total.

Few learners formatted the spreadsheet, with few adding a suitable title. Many learners also failed to display the formula view of the spreadsheet. Most learners produced the expected bar/column chart from the required data range. However, some learners included the total in both the chart and the legend.

The majority of learners scored well in this question. Where they lost marks it was usually due to not displaying the formulae for the spreadsheet, making sure that the information was clear and easy to read and not labelling that the chart clearly.

Areas for improvement and development:
• adding sensible titles to spreadsheets
• adding borders and shading
• using font enhancements to improve layout of spreadsheets
• replication
• printing data from a spreadsheet
• printing the formula view of the spreadsheet
• selecting appropriate graph types
• printing a spreadsheet graph using appropriate size and proportions
• selecting the correct data range for graphs
• adding titles and axes labels to graphs
• removing unnecessary legends from graphs.

Task 3
In Task 3, learners were asked to produce a poster to advertise the talk by the Director of Avatar. They were provided with a text file containing some relevant and non-relevant text and an image bank which contained both appropriate and inappropriate images. The learners were asked to include the name of the director of Avatar, one suitable image and to ensure that the poster was clear and suitable for the target audience. The learners were also asked to demonstrate their ability to make the poster read only to prevent it being amended.

Most learners did not appear to understand that the text chosen for the poster should not give conflicting details; for example, the inclusion of both 'free entry' and 'cost £30'. The majority of the learners inserted suitable images onto the poster.

Several learners lost marks as result of not using a suitable font style and size, which meant that the important information was not highlighted and clear and easy to read. Overall, there was little evidence that learners had checked their work for accuracy and meaning. The layout of poster text and images was often poor, some candidate having simply copied the whole of the data file into a document and added some images with little thought of what was and was not important and relevant.

The majority of the learners failed to demonstrate the ability to make the file read only.

Areas for improvement and development:
• selecting appropriate text from a given data file
• selecting appropriate images from an image bank
• maintaining image proportions
• using appropriate image sizes
• using appropriate font styles and sizes
• planning a suitable layout of text and images
• ensuring that the important information is highlighted
• accessing security features to make file read only

Task 4
In task 4, learners were asked to prepare an email to be sent to the cinema manager, attaching the poster and asking for feedback comments on the poster.

Most learners were able to access email software. It did seem, however, that some learners had not been prepared for using email and attempted to reproduce an email layout in word-processing software. Most learners were able to prepare a suitable email, adding the correct attachment. However, subject lines and messages were not always appropriate for a business setting with many learners being far too familiar in a business context. Many learners did not request an opinion from the email recipient about the poster content. Whilst an unsuitable subject and inappropriate message detracts slightly from the functionality of an email, an incorrect email address renders the email useless. Some learners omitted a subject line completely. Screen shots of the email were often too small for the examiner to read without a magnifying glass.

It was disturbing that centres had not adhered to the instructions in the Instructions for the Conduct of Examinations (ICE) document. Many learners obviously had access to the internet during this task since they were using online web based email accounts. Other learners were using their normal school or personal email accounts. It was also noted that some learners 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 learners should be set up with a dedicated examination email account which can be accessed offline – for example "Outlook Express".

The majority of learners scored well in this question. Where they lost marks it was usually due to no subject lines and message that did not ask for comments on the content of the poster.

Areas for improvement and development:
• accessing email software and accounts offline
• copying email addresses accurately
• 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 learners were asked to produce a screen shot to show their files and where they were stored. Most learners were able to do this successfully. However, some did not save their files using meaningful file names. It was noticeable that some learners were using their home directories which included 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:
• naming files and folders sensibly
• 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 FST01

Maximum mark	50
Pass mark	32
UMS	6

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