Principal Examiners' Report
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Functional Skills ICT Level 2 (FST02)

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FST02 – Functional Skills ICT Level 2

Introduction

Designed to closely match the layout and degree of difficulty of the sample assessment material, January was the second series for this specification. There were approximately 8600 entries. As reported in the Principal Examiner's report for the November 2010 series, there are some marked differences between this specification and that of the pilot. Some candidates seemed ill-prepared for the examination in respect of these differences.

Use of the internet for completion of Section A was well evidenced. However, there remain a number of centres where access to the internet was available to candidates after the initial 15 minutes allowed. This was apparent through from of online email accounts - in some cases the candidate's personal account. Use of the internet other than for the initial 15 minutes is in breach of the examination rules and may result in candidate scripts not being marked at future series.

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.

Although examiners reported far fewer instances of printouts with hand-written details of name, candidate number and centre number than in November, candidates still have problems understanding the instructions for collating their work. Innumerable scripts were submitted with holes incorrectly punched, printouts upside down and not in task order. Centre based supervision and/or preparation may well alleviate such issues and facilitate the marking process.

There were five tasks to be completed by candidates based on a fictional event, YouthFest, to be held at Leeds Castle, Kent in September 2011.

Task 1:
Candidates were required to search the internet and find details of various means of travelling to the YouthFest event – the closest railway station, the motorway and junction number and bus or coach routes. Candidates were asked to list the sources on the ResponsesJanL2 document which was printed as part of their evidence. The travel information retrieved was saved for use in Task 3.

A few candidates failed to provide evidence of the use of a web browser and appropriate search criteria either via completion of ResponsesJanL2 or with printouts from the internet. Most used the Leeds Castle website supplemented with one or two others including Google maps. An insignificant number searched erroneously for Leeds rather than Leeds Castle.

A significant number of candidates achieved 5 of the 6 marks available for this task having successfully identified two modes of transport. Locating details of an appropriate bus/coach service proved problematic for many – despite the fact that at the time of the examination, this information was on the Leeds Castle website.

Areas for improvement and development:
- reading the task and instructions carefully so that the research is relevant
- selecting the website information specifically in relation to the task.

Task 2:
Two spreadsheets were provided for the candidates in connection with this task. The first spreadsheet contained details of costs associated with YouthFest auditions in various cities; the second was a template for calculating a suggested ticket price for the event.

The candidates were asked to enter data, calculate three totals and an average and use some of the calculated data to generate a chart from the first spreadsheet. The calculated overall total was transferred to the second spreadsheet, and additional data provided on the test paper had to be entered. Candidates were then tasked to use two formulae (addition and division to generate a figure on which they could base their suggested ticket price. Candidates were asked to format the initial spreadsheet and the chart to make them 'clear and easy to read'.

A minority of candidates failed to attempt question 2. Most candidates tackled the technical aspects well and were able to secure a large percentage of their marks from this task. Around 40% of candidates failed to provide a formula view and denied themselves the opportunity to earn 5 out of the 20 marks available within the task.

All candidates who submitted work selected a suitable application, ie: spreadsheet. Most candidates calculated the two total costs (horizontal and vertical) correctly. Not all calculated or included the overall total cost and the returned value was often incorrect which suggested a lack of understanding. Where formulae views were included, the choice of the formula was not always the most efficient (eg: use of =c4+d4+e4, etc rather than =SUM) but there was some good evidence of replication.

Data provided was usually correctly entered. However, the task of dividing the calculated total by the entered data to generate an average cost proved a challenge for many. IA significant number of candidates chose the '=AVERAGE' function, which was not appropriate and generated an incorrect answer. Even when accurately calculated, there were some issues with the formula, eg: =SUM(C15/C17).

Many candidates ignored the "clear and easy to read" instruction and did not use any formatting at all. Some haphazard gridlines were included but there were few examples of bold, italics, text wrap, etc. Despite the spreadsheet being 'costs', few candidates included '£' and many of those who did erroneously formatted the entire spreadsheet rather than only the currency values.

Overall, candidates were able to create a chart from the calculated average; however, not all attempted it. Most candidates chose correctly to produce a bar/column chart and selected the correct data range – follow-through being applied to incorrectly calculated values. An appropriate title was usually included, but axes labels were omitted by many. Accuracy of data labels, title, etc was satisfactory.

Finally, using the second spreadsheet, candidates were tasked to recommend a suggested ticket price for the YouthFest event. Follow-through was applied to the inclusion of the calculated overall total from the first spreadsheet. Most candidates entered the two pieces of given data accurately, although where formatting was applied to the currency values some did apply currency to the ticket sales value (28,000). Again, many candidates failed to include their formula view for this task. Where a formula view was included, the '=SUM' to calculate overall total costs was usually correct. However, candidates failed to read the final part of the task and follow the instructions correctly, incorporating a formula in the wrong cell.

Areas for improvement and development:
- printing in formula view
- efficient formulae
- correct syntax
- appropriate and effective formatting, use of text wrap, borders, shading, etc
- axes labels on charts

Task 3:

In Task 3, candidates were asked to design and produce a poster to advertise the YouthFest event using both given and sourced information. They were required to select appropriate text from the provided file YFLeeds2011L2, incorporate images from ImagesJanL2 and include both the travel details found in Task 1 and the ticket price calculated in Task 2.

Almost all candidates produced a document utilising appropriate software. It was disappointing that many were inappropriate and not fit for purpose as posters to advertise the YouthFest event. Few candidates scored well on this task because they did not select appropriate text from the given data file. In addition, the lack of organised layout affected fitness for purpose.

Posters contained irrelevant information about Leeds Castle or, often, the full text from the data file provided rather than a few carefully chosen phrases relating purely to the YouthFest event. There was very little rewording of the text other than by joining phrases together.

The given Leeds Castle contact details and candidate's own researched travel information highlighted in a separately identifiable section of the poster was usually well done. Although many candidates omitted a ticket price altogether, the majority included one with follow-through from Task 2 being applied to those incorrectly calculated.

The majority of candidates included the YouthFest logo. Few candidates used images other than selecting from those within the image bank. Images were sensibly placed and their proportions well maintained. There were few examples of distortion and overlapping text.

There was little evidence that posters had been planned; they often lacked a sense of balance with white space disappointingly used, text truncated and inconsistent use of formatting techniques. Accuracy of content was often an issue with 'YouthFest' and 'Leeds Castle' being the most commonly misspelt words. Candidates seemed to lose sight of the purpose and audience for the poster and this impacted on the overall fitness for purpose of the finished product.

Areas for improvement and development:
- selecting textual content to fit the purpose of the product
- appropriate rewording of given text
- following instructions in respect of incorporating researched material (eg travel information and ticket price)
- using formatting techniques effectively
- planning to ensure sensible use of white space
- checking for fitness for audience and purpose
- checking for accuracy of content, spelling and grammar.

Task 4:
The first part of Task 4 required candidates to email their TicketPrice spreadsheet as an attachment to Sarah Hudson at YouthFest with a copy to Ben White, chairman of the organising committee.   The email addresses were provided.

A few candidates omitted this task, but most candidates were able to access email software although, as reported, some used internet based accounts.   A significant number of candidates copied the given email addresses incorrectly and many did not include Ben White's address on the 'cc' line. Most candidates attached the necessary file successfully but many omitted a subject line. A significant number of candidates did not include an appropriate message in a suitable format, often personalising their messages and/or including salutations and complimentary closes.

The second part of Task 4 required candidates to identify and describe one of the dangers of opening unsolicited email attachments, adding their answer in the appropriate place on ResponsesJanL2.   The majority of candidates recognised viruses or spyware as a potential danger but did not expand this answer to indicate how this would affect the user.

Areas for improvement and development:
- accessing email software offline
- copying email addresses accurately
- appropriate use of cc
- use of subject line and relevant wording of subject
- composing an appropriate message – without salutations and complimentary close
- producing screenshots of a sufficient size to enable them to be read

Task 5:

Task 5 was in three separate parts. The first part required a screenshot of the candidate's saved poster. The other parts required written answers in respect of meaningful file names and locked spreadsheet cells. Candidates were tasked to add their answers in the appropriate place on ResponsesJanL2.

Candidates who attempted the first part of the question provided the necessary screenshot, although many were inappropriately sized and difficult to decipher. Whilst most file names were reasonable, there were still a few instances of 'poster'.

Ease of retrieval/location was the most frequent answer to the reason for always using meaningful files names. Some answers were very difficult to follow and understand, not helped by typographical and spelling errors. There were some instances of the use of text speak which is not appropriate in the context of an external assessment.

The third part of the task in respect of locking spreadsheet cells proved problematic for the majority. Many candidates are clearly not aware of the facility to lock a spreadsheet cell or the purpose for doing this.

Areas for improvement and development:
- producing screenshots of a sufficient size to enable them to be read
- using meaningful filenames for a range of documents
- understanding 'security' features of spreadsheets

Pass mark for FST01

Maximum mark	**50**
Pass mark	**30**
UMS	**6**

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