Principal Examiner Feedback

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Functional Skills ICT Level 1 (FST01)

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FST01 – Functional Skills ICT Level 1

Introduction

This was the fourth series of examinations for this specification. The paper was written to closely match the layout and the degree of difficulty of the previous series. There were approximately over 19,000 entries for the qualification, the largest entry so far. As with previous series, it was felt that some candidates were not sufficiently 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 as there were instances where candidates had used images from the internet for later tasks. Some candidates had clearly used online email account facilities, in some cases they had used their personal email accounts (often Hotmail or Googlemail). 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.

Centres should make sure that candidates' work is collated correctly before it is submitted to the examiner as many candidates did not hole punch the printouts correctly, some pages were upside down or back to front and they were frequently not in task number order. Also candidates' work should not be inserted into plastic pockets.

Candidates 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 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; the background to which was The Garden Bird Survey.

Task 1

In this task the candidates were asked to search the internet to locate the length of a chaffinch, they then had to record this information in the ResponsesJuneL1 plus a screen shot of the search engine they had used and the URL of the website where they found the information. Most candidates opened the correct file and entered the correct information about the Chaffinch and pasted the relevant screenshot and URL into the file. A significant number of candidates gained 4 for marks for this task, however some candidates took a screenshot of the website rather than the search engine which often resulted in a loss of 2 marks as no search criteria was evident. Some candidates entered the URL of the search engine (usually www.google.co.uk) rather than that of the website and a very small minority did not enter a complete URL

Areas for improvement and development:
- recognising the difference between a search engine and a website
- recording a complete URL.

Task 2

In Task 2, candidates were presented with a spreadsheet which contained figures showing the number of birds seen in a garden in 1998 and 2008. They were asked to add the numbers for starlings seen for both years. Almost all candidates achieved the 3 marks available for opening the correct file and entering the correct data. Candidates were then required to calculate the fall in numbers between 1998 and 2008 for each of the 5 birds on the spreadsheet. They were also asked to make sure that the information was clear and easy to read. Significant number of candidates calculated the correct 'Fall in numbers', however many candidates did not include a printout of the spreadsheet in formula view and some had clearly added the figures together rather than calculating the difference. A minority of candidates clearly misunderstood the instructions and totalled the 1998 and 2008 columns individually.

Some candidates did format the spreadsheet title and/or the column and row headings but a significant number did not. Where shading was used it was usually applied indiscriminately and in bright colours which made the figures difficult to read.

The last part of the task was to produce a line graph comparing the 1998 and 2008 data for all birds, the graph had to be clearly labelled and easy to understand. Most candidates attempted to produce the expected line graph from the required data range, however, some candidates included the 'Fall in numbers' figures in the graph. A significant number of candidates did not include a sensible title and either missed adding axes labels altogether or added incorrect ones.

A significant number of candidates scored well in this question, however where marks were lost it was usually as a result of not displaying formulas for the spreadsheet, making sure that the information was clear and easy to read, selecting the incorrect information for the graph and not labelling the graph clearly.

Areas for improvement and development:
- adding sensible titles to spreadsheets
- adding effective formatting enhancements to improve the overall readability of the data such as:
  - gridlines/borders
  - shading key information such as totals
  - emboldening column headings
- printing data from a spreadsheet
- printing the formula view of the spreadsheet
- selecting the correct data range for graphs
- selecting appropriate graph types
- adding sensible titles and axes labels to graphs.

Task 3

In Task 3, candidates were asked to produce a data collection form so that volunteers could record the numbers of 5 wild birds for The Garden Bird Survey 2011. They were given a text file containing relevant text and an image bank which contained both appropriate and inappropriate images. The candidates were asked to create a table to include the text from the provided file, the correct images from the image bank and the information they found about the length of a chaffinch in Task 1. Candidates were required to ensure that the form was clear and suitable for the volunteers to read, save the form using a meaningful file name and, finally, to demonstrate their ability to make the form read only.

The majority of the candidates inserted a table into the form but some did not include the correct number of columns required for the data. Most candidates included the correct text and positioned it above the table as requested although a few missed off the last paragraph. Most candidates selected the correct images of birds from the image file, only a small number included the image of the robin. Some candidates lost marks as they did not insert the images into the table. Marks were also lost by some candidates as they did not consider the sizing of their images and/or included distorted images which would have made it difficult for the observers to identify the birds using the form. A small number of candidates misunderstood the task and included the spreadsheet from task 2 instead of the information provided.

Most candidates used an appropriate font type and size for the body text and title of the form, although some candidates used the same font size for both so that the title did not stand out.

The majority of the candidates did well on this task and where marks were lost it was generally where candidates had misunderstood the purpose of the form and had either not included a table or had included the incorrect information in the table. A significant number of students achieved 1 or 2 marks for showing that they had made the file read only although some candidates provided no evidence for this part of the task.

Areas for improvement and development:
- selecting appropriate text from a given data file
- creating and formatting tables
- maintaining image proportions and sizes
- using font size appropriate to the document's purpose
- planning a suitable layout of text and images
- checking for accuracy
- accessing security features to make file read only.

Task 4

In task 4, candidates were asked to prepare an email to be sent to the secretary of The Garden Bird Survey with the data collection form attached. Most candidates were able to access email software, prepare a suitable email and add the correct attachment; however, subject lines and messages were not always appropriate for a business setting with many candidates using inappropriate greetings to the secretary and a subject line that lacked sufficient detail e.g. mentioning the data collection form. Candidates were instructed to ask the secretary for her opinion of the form and most candidates did this although they did not always use appropriate language to do this.

It was disturbing that some centres had not adhered to the instructions in the Instructions for the Conduct of Examinations (ICE) document and many candidates obviously had access to the internet during this task since they were using online web based email accounts. 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". Some candidates appeared not to be able to access the internet at all as they had created the emails in a word processing package.

The majority of candidates scored well in this question. Where they lost marks it was mainly due to lack of information on subject lines and inappropriate or missing message text.

Areas for improvement and development:
• accessing email software and accounts offline
• using appropriate greetings and subject lines in an email
• writing appropriate messages in an email
• attaching files to an email.

Task 5

In task 5 candidates were asked to produce a screen shot to show where their files were stored and the filenames used. The majority of candidates were able to do this successfully; however, some did not save their files using meaningful file names.

A cause for concern was that some candidates were using their home directories which included files and folders created outside the examination window. For future examination series, centres must ensure that dedicated user accounts are setup for use during the examination.

Areas for improvement and development:
   •   choosing meaningful filenames
   •   producing a screen shot of an appropriate size in which the text is legible.

Pass mark for FST01

Maximum mark	50
Pass mark	31
UMS	6

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