

Principal Examiner Feedback

November 2011

Functional Skills ICT Level 2 (FST02)

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FST02 – Functional Skills ICT Level 2

Introduction

This was the fifth series of the Level 2 Functional Skills ICT test. Many of the issues that have been noted in previous series are still evident in responses during this series. There were over 5000 candidates entered for the test. There are significant differences between the current specification and the Functional Skills Pilot specification. Reports from examiners indicate that there continue to be a small number of Centres where it seems that some candidates have been poorly prepared for the test. A pass in the test is intended to be approximately equivalent to the Grade B standard in GCSE. Responses from candidates do not always reflect this standard.

It is a requirement of this test that candidates should have access to the internet only during the first 15 minutes of the test. There continues to be evidence that the relevant staff in Centres are seemingly unaware of this stipulation and that facilities for offline email are not made available to candidates for the purpose of this test. There are some centres where the use of students' personal email accounts (e.g. Hotmail, Yahoo mail etc) is still evident. Centres need to ensure that candidates are reminded that there could be serious consequences if they are found to be breaching the code. The guidelines for setting up the user accounts for the test are clearly laid out in the Information for the Conduct of the Examination issued for each series. Centres are also reminded that it is a requirement that separate user areas, not accessible to candidates outside their sitting of the test, should be prepared. There is some evidence from screenshots produced during the test that candidates are using their normal desktop and documents folders.

There were, as usual, five tasks to be completed during the test. These were based on a scenario about a sponsored coast to coast cycle ride.

Task 1: Internet research

Candidates were asked to research the internet for the name of a campsite near Keswick in Cumbria and the cost of staying one night. They were also asked to find the name and address of a UK-based children's charity.

Candidates generally succeeded in using a search engine to find the information in Task 1a. They were asked to take a screenshot of the search engine, clearly showing the search criteria. Many candidates seem unaware of what constitutes the search engine and failed to show the full page and often search criteria were not evidenced clearly. Many candidates showed the page from a campsite rather than the search engine. Sometimes the screen shot was reproduced so small that it was not possible to read the criteria text. Though not penalised in this series candidates have a tendency to write sentences in the search criteria rather than picking out the key words. Candidates should be reminded that they should check the printout to ensure that the necessary evidence is easily read. Most candidates scored marks for naming a suitable campsite and the cost of a one-night stay.

In part b, they were asked to obtain the name and address of a children's charity. They were also asked to copy the website address into a table. Many candidates gained full marks for this task. Those that failed to gain full marks often did not include the full postal address – usually in these instances only including the name

and post code. Also when candidates are asked for a website address, too often the address given is a derivative of google.com or google.co.uk.

Areas for improvement and development

- Understanding the term "search engine"
- Understanding the term "search criteria"
- Producing screenshots which show the required information in a readable manner
- Copying website addresses accurately and completely

Task 2: Spreadsheet

There were 5 sub-tasks for the Spreadsheet activity. Candidates were presented with a spreadsheet which included details of the cyclists and the sponsorship. They were required to format the spreadsheet to make it clearer. They were then asked to sort the spreadsheet into alphabetical order of Sponsor Last Name within ascending order of Cyclist Name, produce a formula to calculate the amount raised, summarise the sponsorship of each cyclist and then produce a graph to show the amount raised by each cyclist.

Most candidates were able to access the spreadsheet but the quality of the formatting was very variable. Many candidates failed to format currency values appropriately and often left the spreadsheet with truncated data. The application of borders and shading was another area of weakness for many candidates. For the majority of spreadsheets, horizontal shading is more appropriate than vertical shading. Adding borders around blank cells was frequently seen.

The majority of candidates managed the sorting of column A, but failed to do the secondary sort correctly. Many candidates appear not to have been taught how to carry out sorting of a complete table rather than just the single column. Frequently candidates presented a list sorted on Sponsor Last Name rather than on Cyclist name.

Most candidates correctly calculated the values for the amount raised by the sponsorship. Many candidates still do not provide a formula view of the spreadsheet. This meant that they were unable to gain 5 of the 18 spreadsheet marks on this examination. It was expected that candidates at this level would realise that for efficiency a conditional formula would be required and an absolute cell reference. Very few candidates attempted to use an IF function. Candidates who failed to use an IF statement or an absolute cell reference had to manually change the formula for each row so that the formula entered worked correctly. This meant that they failed to gain the mark available for replication.

The correct totals summarising the data for each cyclist was completed successfully by a large percentage of candidates. However, many lost marks for not using an efficient formula.

Finally candidates were asked to provide a chart of the summary table. Most candidates produced the correct type of chart but had not produced an appropriate title. Candidates should be encouraged to use the wording in the instructions to assist in creating a meaningful title for the chart. Several candidates produce charts with no axis labels on bar/column charts. Some candidates also lost a mark for having unnecessary information displayed on the graph e.g. a legend and category data labels.

Areas for improvement and development

- Formatting a spreadsheet

- Currency
- Decimal places
- Appropriate borders and shading
- Word wrapping
- Appropriate row heights and column widths
- Use of text formatting to enhance visual clarity e.g. bold, italics, font size
- Using formulae
 - Simple formulae using arithmetic symbols (+, -, / and *)
 - Using functions e.g. SUM, IF where appropriate
 - Using efficient formulae
 - Using absolute and relative cell references
- Sorting
 - On one column
 - On multiple columns (secondary sorting)
 - Expanding selection to include full table
- Graphs
 - Pie charts, line graphs and column or bar charts
 - Suitable titles
 - Appropriate legend
 - Axes labels where relevant
- Printing
 - Printing in data view
 - Printing in formula view
 - Adding footers with candidate details
 - Fitting a spreadsheet to one page
 - Making sure that colour schemes used are still readable when printed in monochrome.

Task 3 – Presentation of information

Task 3 usually brings together information from the internet research and the spreadsheet tasks to produce a document aimed at a particular audience. Often the candidates will be expected to also select text and images to produce an integrated document. In this series, candidates were asked to produce a presentation for an audience of adults (local councillors) informing them about the sponsored cycle ride. Candidates were provided with a text file which contained text which might be relevant to the presentation. The text file also included statements which were not relevant.

They were also provided with a set of images from which a suitable selection was expected. Most candidates produced a presentation which matched the requirement to be no more than 4 slides and were able to print these two to a page in handout format. They also gained marks for including the name of the charity and the campsite they researched in Task 1 and the chart they produced in Task 2.

However, they often failed to be selective in the text included. They apparently failed to notice the contradiction in cycling 147 miles in 4 days yet not cycling more than 10 miles a day. Many also included the incorrect statement that the cyclists would catch the train from Whitehaven to Sunderland (rather than doing the cycling). The appropriate selection of information is a key functional skill in ICT. It is a disappointment that so many candidates do not check the content of documents to make sure that the text/images are fit for purpose.

Many candidates also failed to edit the text so that it was presented more suitably for an on-screen presentation rather than a printed document. Many included paragraphs rather than short sentences or phrases. The majority of candidates

sized the text appropriately for an on-screen presentation to an audience. Some failed to realise the need for text to be large enough to read from a distance.

As the second part of task 3, candidates were asked to amend one of the slides to make it more suitable for a younger audience and then explain how they had changed the slide. Most candidates chose to change the images. The inclusion of a motor bike was not deemed to be an appropriate change. Most candidates were able to explain the concept of capturing the attention of the younger audience by changing the image and/or simplifying the text.

Areas for improvement and development

- Selection of appropriate software for producing an on-screen presentation
- Integration of information from a variety of sources including text, images, tables and graphs
- Consideration of suitability in selection of text/images for an audience and purpose
- Use of formatting techniques such as appropriate:
 - text enhancements – bold, italic, underline, font sizes
 - selection of font styles
 - selection of font sizes for a presentation
- Consideration of fitness for purpose
- Consideration of audience
- Printing a presentation in handout format

Task 4 – Communication: preparing an email

Candidates were asked to add two contacts to the address book/contact list. They were then asked to prepare an email which could be sent to the cyclists. They were to attach a copy of the presentation to the email.

As mentioned previously, examiners report that there are still several centres where there is evidence that candidates are accessing the internet during this task and using online accounts - often these are the candidates' personal accounts. This is unacceptable and a breach of the code of practice for this examination. Candidates who access online accounts may face disqualification for these breaches. Examiners also noted that some candidates seemed to be using an existing account with several (often personal) contacts already in the address book and messages in the inbox/outbox/sent boxes. There are ways of producing the evidence using offline account systems – for example the setting up of Outlook or Outlook Express accounts as part of the examination account used by the candidate. Centres are reminded that the accounts set up for the test should be cleared of previous contents. Further guidance is also available on the Frequently Asked Questions section of the Edexcel Functional Skills website.

Other candidates often failed to get marks because they did not provide evidence of using email software. These candidates produced word documents and therefore could not provide evidence of attaching the menu. They were still able to gain the two marks available for a suitable subject and a suitable message. Many candidates produced a screenshot of the correct type but the quality was so poor that the contents of the address book could not be assessed. As mentioned previously, candidates should be advised to check printouts to ensure that the evidence required by the examiner is readable.

The specification for Level 2 includes reference to organising electronic messages, attachments and contacts. This series, candidates were asked to provide a screen shot of the contacts page or address book showing the addition of two contacts. Most candidates produced the correct screenshot but failed to gain some of the

marks because the addresses were truncated or incorrectly copied from the question paper.

Examiners continue to find that email messages are not suitable in tone or content. Often the messages are not spell-checked and grammar-checked and the tone is not suitable for a formal message.

Areas for improvement and development

- Selection of appropriate software for producing email
- Careful copying of text from question paper especially email addresses
- Addition of contacts to an address book/contact list
- Attachment of file to email
- Using a suitable subject line for an email
- Using appropriate language for email messages
- Ensuring that screen shot evidence is readable

Task 5: Using ICT

In Task 5, candidates were asked about the dangers of downloading attachments in an email. Most candidates scored well on identifying the danger and mentioned the possibility of downloading a virus. Candidates also usually mentioned either the installation of anti-virus software or only downloading items from trusted senders of email messages, but rarely mentioned both concepts.

Areas for improvement and development

- Understanding the danger of computer viruses
- Understanding of how to minimise risk of computer viruses

Pass mark for FST02

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.

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