

Principal Examiner Feedback

February 2012

Functional Skills ICT

Level 2 (FST02)

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Publications Code FC030697

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Introduction

This was the seventh series of the Level 2 Functional Skills ICT test. Many of the issues noted in previous series continued to be evident in responses during this series. 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 (ICE) issued for each series. Centres are also reminded that it is a requirement that separate user areas, not accessible to candidates outside their test session, should be prepared. There is some evidence from screenshots produced during the test that candidates are using their regular desktop and document folders.

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

Task 1

Candidates were asked to use an internet search engine to gather background information about West Side Story.

Candidates were then required to paste a screen shot of the search engine and the criteria used into the responses document. Whilst many candidates successfully completed this task others failed to gain the marks as they presented the result of the search, i.e. web pages, rather than the search engine itself. Where supplied the search criteria were usually correct; however, some candidates submitted screen shots which were so small that it was not possible to read the criteria entered. Candidates should be encouraged to check printouts for legibility.

In task 1(b) candidates were asked to find the names of the people who wrote the script, music and lyrics for the original Broadway production of West Side Story, along with the year of production. Unfortunately, many candidates did not discriminate within their findings and supplied inappropriate answers to one or more of the categories. Thus, they could not be awarded the marks available. In general candidates achieved the final mark for this task by inputting the URL for the website used.

Areas for improvement and development:

- understanding the term 'search engine'
- producing legible printouts
- checking that the responses given match the questions being asked on the paper

Task 2

There were four sub-tasks for this activity. Candidates were presented with a spreadsheet showing the standard prices for tickets in different seating areas of a theatre. Their tasks were to:

- calculate opening night prices at a discounted rate of 95%
- calculate the total income generated for ticket sales on the opening night
- use a spreadsheet function to determine whether the opening night would be profitable
- produce a chart showing the income generated for each ticket type as a percentage of total income

Although there were examples of competent and confident users of spreadsheets across all four sub-tasks, there were few who secured high marks with many errors and omissions. Many candidates lost marks in the first three sub-tasks by failing to submit printouts in formula view.

Most candidates gained the first mark by opening the correct file. Where formulae were used replication was well evidenced, but it was apparent that many candidates had little idea of how to use an appropriate formula. Calculating a percentage within a formula proved outside the scope of large numbers of candidates and there were some very convoluted – and often incorrect - ways of approaching this task.

In task 2(b) many secured the first mark via a correct value in data view. Where the formula view was provided, there were many examples of the correct use of the =sum function which gained two marks. However, many candidates used the less efficient formula =E2+E3+E4 etc which earned only one mark.

This is a level 2 paper, and despite its inclusion in every series, there were significant number of candidates who included no formatting whatsoever, including formatting of currency to £2dp. Candidates must be encouraged to use formatting techniques that improve the clarity of the information presented. There were some excellent examples where candidates had achieved this using shading and/or borders/ and/or bold (etc). However, many used borders but either failed to cover all data or included irrelevant rows, some made all the data and headings bold, some shaded everything - all of which failed to improve clarity.

Many candidates made no attempt to use an 'IF' statement in task 2(c) and where seen, its use seemed to be 'localised' within centre cohorts. Of those who attempted the task, the vast majority gained the first mark. However, few gained the remaining marks as their attempts were either incorrectly formulated or incomplete. A small minority lost at least one of the marks by failing to widen columns so that all of the function could be seen.

Although there were issues with devising the correct values in 2(c), most candidates used their own calculated values to present a chart of some description for 2(d). A pie chart was expected, but many candidates created bar charts, illustrating that they had failed to respond to the instruction to incorporate percentages. Those candidates who had produced pie charts

usually included the percentage within the segments; those who produced bar charts could not access this mark. In both types of charts the majority included ticket type labels but titles were poor. Even where included, the title failed to incorporate both aspects expected. The final mark was awarded for fitness for audience and purpose; however, many failed to secure the mark due to omissions and inaccuracies in respect of the previous mark points, or the graph being on the same sheet as data, or spelling and capitalisation errors.

Areas for improvement and development:

- Formatting a spreadsheet by using
 - £ and 2dp for currency
 - borders and shading to enhance clarity
 - text formatting to enhance clarity
 - appropriate column widths
- Using formulae
 - simple formulae to complete calculations
 - appropriate use of functions e.g. SUM IF and LOOKUP
 - efficient formulae
- Graphs
 - appropriate use of charts/graphs e.g. pie chart, bar chart, line graph
 - use of labels where necessary
 - inserting appropriate titles
 - checking all labels and title for correct spelling and capitalisation
- Printing
 - data view
 - formula view
 - using headers and footers for candidate details
 - fitting printouts to one page

Task 3

Candidates were required to produce a newsletter for the theatre; this was to include information about productions, ticket prices and other events. The candidates were asked to incorporate the information from their internet research and relevant information from their spreadsheets task. They were provided with a set of data files from which they were also instructed to select a logo, relevant images and relevant additional information from a text file.

The candidates were instructed to fill two sides of A4 and present the newsletter in a well structured manner with content presented in a manner appealing to theatre-goers. The majority did provide 2 sides of A4; however, documents were often not well structured and little consideration had been given to audience and purpose.

A significant number of candidates failed to incorporate any relevant information from their internet research or the ticket prices calculated in their spreadsheet task. In addition, many candidates failed to consider what constituted relevant images and/or text provided in the data files. The majority did however incorporate the logo.

There were some improvements in terms of presentation of the document compared to previous series; less use of Word Art was seen, images were mostly of an appropriate size with proportions maintained, images and the logo were appropriately located and candidates had made good use of sub headings. However, many candidates used a variety of text styles in their documents and there was a great deal of inconsistency in text sizes for body text.

Areas for improvement and development:

- planning the solution to a complex task
- integration of information from a variety of sources
- selection of suitable text and images for an audience and purpose
- appropriate use of formatting techniques
 - selection of font styles
 - selection of font sizes for headings, sub-headings and body text
 - text enhancements e.g. bold, underline, italics
 - appropriate use of formatting e.g. columns
- consideration of fitness for purpose
- consideration of audience

Task 4

Candidates generally did well in this task which was to prepare an email, with an attachment to send to the manager of the theatre and to copy in the publicity manager.

There was an improvement on previous series with far fewer candidates using word processing software to prepare emails rather than using off-line email facilities. However, there is still evidence that some centres are allowing internet access during this task, with candidates using personal email accounts. 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.

A significant number of candidates failed to gain the first mark by incorrectly placing the second recipient's email address as a entry on the 'To' line rather than the 'CC' line. Although subjects and/or attachments were sometimes omitted, most candidates gained the second mark; however, there were a few who did not use meaningful file names e.g. publication1.

There are still many candidates who do not write messages which are not suitable in tone and/or content, often using 'text speak' abbreviations. Many fail to check spelling and grammar.

Areas for improvement and development:

- selection of appropriate software to prepare emails in the examination
- accurate copying of email addresses
- using the CC line to copy in additional recipients
- consideration of tone for a formal email
- use of spelling and grammar checking facilities

Task 5

There were two parts to the question, with candidates entering their answers in the responses document used in Task 1. Many candidates produced multiple copies of this document where a single copy would suffice.

In task 5(a) candidates were asked to identify two ways to reduce the risk of viruses when using the internet. Although anti-virus, email attachments, pop-ups and non-trustworthy sites were often mentioned, many of the candidates did not describe their relevance in the context of the question sufficiently well to secure the available marks. Firewalls and even anti spyware were regularly included as incorrect responses.

In task 5(b) candidates were asked to password protect their newsletter and produce a screen shot as evidence. The software chosen to produce the newsletter was a major factor in candidates' ability to complete this task. However, even where the software provided this facility few made an attempt to complete the task and others produced weak and often incomplete evidence.

Areas for improvement and development:

- understand how viruses can be prevented when using the internet
- understand how to password protect a document
- provide full and detailed responses

Pass mark for FST02

Maximum mark	50
Pass mark	31
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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