

Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2012

Functional Skills ICT (FST02)
Level 2

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Introduction

This was the sixth 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 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 an image and information about the London Eye.

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 about London Eye 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 correctly obtaining the required information. Where some candidates did lose marks was obtaining the price of combined tickets rather than just admission to the London Eye.

Candidates were asked to obtain an image of London Eye and provide acknowledgment of where the image was obtained. Often the website address given was a derivative of google.com or google.co.uk and sometimes just "Google images". Candidates need to understand that the purpose of the acknowledgment is to give credit to the owner of the image and that Google do not own the images – they only provide a directory of where the images may be found.

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
- Acknowledging appropriate sources of information

Task 2 – Spreadsheet

There were 5 sub-tasks for the Spreadsheet activity. Candidates were presented with a spreadsheet which consisted of two worksheets. They were required to format one of the worksheets to make it clearer. They were then asked to sort the spreadsheet into alphabetical order of Attraction and produce a formula to calculate the cost of 24 tickets to each listed attraction. They were then asked to use the second worksheet to calculate the cost of a number of tickets where the price depended on whether the size of the group visiting the attraction was larger than a discount group size. Finally they were asked to produce a graph of the costs for these visits.

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 worksheets, horizontal shading is more appropriate than vertical shading. The adding of borders around blank cells was frequently seen.

The majority of candidates managed the sorting of the attraction but did not sort the complete table so that the information became jumbled. Most candidates were able to identify the three most popular attractions and were able to calculate the cost of 24 tickets to each attraction.

Very few candidates attempted to use an IF function. Candidates are expected to use efficient formulae at this level. IF functions are indicated within the delivery guide and it is disappointing to see so few candidates prepared sufficiently to attempt their use in the examination. Several candidates again failed to produce a formula view of the spreadsheet and as a result failed to gain marks for the calculations.

Finally candidates were asked to provide a chart. Most candidates produced the correct type of chart but did not produce an appropriate title. Candidates should be encouraged to use the wording in the instructions to assist in creating a meaningful title for charts. 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 and LOOKUP 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 in a sort
- Graphs
 - Pie charts, line graphs and column or bar charts
 - Inserting a suitable title on the chart
 - Appropriate legends
 - 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 two page leaflet for the exchange students. Candidates were provided with a file which contained text which might be relevant to the leaflet. The file also included text which was not required for the leaflet.

They were also provided with a set of images from which a suitable selection was expected. Most candidates produced a leaflet which matched the stated requirements of including information about the three most popular attractions and the London Eye.

Some candidates included the text and images about all the attractions. Candidates were expected to present the information so that it was fit for purpose. This will usually involve appropriateness of fonts and styles so that documents are consistent and well laid out. Often images and text were truncated because insufficient care had been taken in the placement and checking the layout. Many candidates used inappropriate hyphenation of text so that words like Palace became hyphenated.

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
 - hyphenation
 - checking for consistency in font sizes and styles
- Checking for truncation of text and/or images
- Consideration of fitness for purpose
- Consideration of audience

Task 4 – Communication: preparing an email

Candidates were asked to prepare an email which could be sent to the Manager of the organisation. They were to attach a copy of the leaflet to the email. 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. For example “Hi Pat” was considered to be inappropriate for the opening of a message to a Manager.

As mentioned previously, some 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 some of the contents 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.

Areas for improvement and development

- Selection of appropriate software for producing email
- Careful copying of text from the question paper especially email addresses
- Attachment of files to an 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

Often responses to Task 5 are entered at the end of the Responses document used for Task 1. Many candidates print out and include multiple copies of this document. Some candidates produced 3 or even 4 copies of the document – one each for Task 1a, 1b 5a and 5b. This is unnecessary. A single completed copy is all that is required. Instructions to print at Task 1 are included in case candidates fail to complete the full examination.

In Task 5, candidates were asked about the legal issues about using images downloaded from the internet. Many candidates mentioned copyright but were not always clear about which aspect of copyright was involved. Some mentioned that Pat should ask their permission before using the leaflet since they had produced it.

In the second part of Task 5, candidates were asked about how the internet could be use to assist collaboration in producing improved documents. Many candidates produced vague or incomplete answers, often with just the word “email” as their response. They are expected to comment on the possibility of using shared documents etc.

Areas for improvement and development

- Understanding the legal issues about the use of copyright images
- Understanding of how document sharing and exchange can assist in collaborative working

Pass mark for FST02

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.

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