

Principal Examiner Feedback

May 2012

Functional Skills ICT
Level 2 (FST02)

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Introduction

This was the ninth 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. 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. There is also evidence from pupil responses that Centres are not setting up new accounts for each series and data files from previous series are available and that items in email clients are not cleared before the start of the examination week. 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. Some centres contacted Edexcel to indicate that their network systems prevented candidates from accessing required elements of the specification – in particular for this series the addition of contact details for new contacts. It is important that Centres provide the appropriate facilities for candidates to complete all tasks within the specification. 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. Further guidance on email and internet access is available from Edexcel if required

There were, as usual, five tasks to be completed during the test. These were based on a scenario about a consultancy for novice users of computers. The age range of the novices was deliberately left unspecified.

Task 1 – Internet Research

Candidates were asked to research the internet for images and a website promoting internet safety for beginners.

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 resulting web page 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.

Candidates were asked to obtain two images connected with internet safety 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” or similar image directories. Candidates need to understand that the purpose of the acknowledgment is to give credit to the owner of the image and that Google and PicSearch (for example) 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 4 sub-tasks for the Spreadsheet activity. Candidates were presented with a spreadsheet which consisted of three worksheets. They were asked to enter information on the first worksheet using a vlookup to information on the second sheet. They were then required to add calculations to complete an invoice for a customer of the consultancy. They were also asked to format the worksheet to make it fit for purpose. They were then asked to sort the third worksheet into descending order of Total. Finally they were asked to produce a graph of the income from each service for each of the last four weeks.

Most candidates were able to access the spreadsheet but very few correctly used the vlookup function to add the required information. Using lookup functions is mentioned in the Delivery Guide and it was disappointing that so few candidates attempted to use this function. Many candidates copied the information by typing it in. This often led to errors in transcription – a poor example of functionality at this level. Other formulas used on the first sheet were better – but many candidates do not use efficient formulas – though these were not penalised on this occasion.

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 rows was frequently seen.

The majority of candidates managed the sorting of the total but did not sort the complete table so that the information became jumbled.

Finally candidates were asked to provide a chart. Most candidates produced the correct type of chart but did not include just the correct data range with many not including the items as category labels or including the total as well as the four weekly amounts. Candidates should be encouraged to use the wording in the instructions to assist in creating a meaningful title for charts. It is disappointing to see that so many candidates at this level 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. category data labels with both codes and descriptions.

Areas for improvement and development

- formatting a spreadsheet
 - currency
 - decimal places
 - effective borders and shading
 - word wrapping
 - sensible 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 VLOOKUP 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 with one or more series of data
 - inserting a suitable title on the chart
 - appropriate legends
 - axes labels where relevant
- printing
 - printing in data view and 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 four slides for a presentation to a local community group of computer novices. Candidates were provided with a file which contained text which might be relevant to the presentation. The file also included text which was not required for the presentation. They were given guidance about what should be included in the presentation.

They were also provided with a set of images from which a suitable selection was expected. Most candidates produced a presentation which matched the stated requirements.

Some candidates included all the text and images. 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 failed to realise that text for a slide presentation is better presented as a set of key points (with or without bullets) rather than as long paragraphs. They also tended to use font styles and sizes that were inappropriate for a presentation. There was also often little evidence of planning a professional looking presentation with either a cluttered or inconsistent approach to the slides.

Areas for improvement and development

- selection of appropriate software for producing an on-screen or paper-based presentation of information
- 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 suitable 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 add two names and email addresses to the contact list or address book.

They were then asked to prepare an email which could be sent to the two contacts. They were to attach a copy of the presentation to the email with a message to the presenters that the presentation was attached.

Many candidates lost marks because they failed to display the contact or addresses screen. Others lost marks because they did not check that the text they added was correct. Spelling errors in email addresses make the address non-functional. Candidates should check very carefully that the email addresses that they add are fit for the purpose.

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” and “Hey guys” were considered to be inappropriate.

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. There were fewer of these candidates who produced word documents and therefore did not provide the required evidence. 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. Truncation of email addresses was a frequent observation.

Areas for improvement and development

- selection of appropriate software for producing email
- ability to display and add contacts or addresses
- 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 usually 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 copies of the document – one each for Task 1a, 1b 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 to create a new folder for the IT Solutions for Novices organisation and to move the files they had created or edited into the new folder. Most candidates managed to complete this task correctly and there were much fewer candidates using an inappropriate folder name (such as “New Folder”). Candidates should be taught to use meaningful file and folder names in the context of the scenario. Folder names such as “Exam work” whilst not penalised on this occasion are not really appropriate for the work completed supposedly for an organisation such as IT Solutions for Novices. It was also noticed by several examiners that candidates appeared to be using their normal logon and had access to folders for work other than the examination. Centre staff are reminded that new user accounts for each series should be set up just for use in the examination.

Candidates were then asked to respond to a question about publishing personal data on the internet. There were many good responses but many candidates repeated the same point using slightly different wording.

Areas for improvement and development

- creation of appropriately named folders and files
- understanding the dangers of publishing personal information on the internet.

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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