

Principal Examiner Feedback

March 2012

Functional Skills ICT

Level 2 (FST02)

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Publications Code FC031095

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Introduction

This was the eighth 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 appears 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 and Google 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 hairdressing salon that specialises in organic hair products.

Task 1 – Internet Research

Candidates were asked to research the internet for an image and information about organic hair products.

Candidates generally succeeded in using a search engine to find the price of a 200ml bottle of organic shampoo 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 organic hair products 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. Some candidates did lose marks for omitting the 200ml and a relevant reason why a customer should buy the product.

Candidates were asked to obtain an image of someone shampooing their hair 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 4 sub-tasks for the Spreadsheet activity. Candidates were presented with a spreadsheet which consisted of one worksheet. They were required to format the worksheet to make it clearer. They were then asked to calculate the number of each product sold and calculate the number of products sold by each member of staff. They were then asked to use the functions of the spreadsheet to automatically enter ‘Bonus’ or ‘No Bonus’ for each member of staff who sold 100 products or more. Finally they were asked to produce a chart to display the number of product sold by each member of staff.

Most candidates were able to access the spreadsheet but the quality of the formatting was very variable. Many candidates failed to format 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. Some shading was inappropriate as it failed to improve clarity and vertical columns.

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. Candidates who attempted this question were awarded at least 1 mark for the use of =IF(). However many candidates used the incorrect conditional > rather than the correct ones of >= or <. The consequence of this meant they also lost the 3rd mark. In addition some candidates provided the correct conditional but then lost the 3rd mark because the formula was truncated or not evidenced. A significant number failed to provide a formula view printout and therefore were unable to gain the marks available.

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. A significant number failed to produce charts with no axis labels on bar or column charts and very few candidates labelled the axis correctly. 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 spread sheet
 - effective borders and shading
 - word wrapping
 - sensible row heights and column widths
 - 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
- graphs
 - pie charts, line graphs and column or bar charts
 - inserting a suitable title on the chart
 - legends
 - axis labels
- Printing
 - printing in data and formula view
 - inserting footers with candidate details
 - fitting a spread sheet to one page
 - making sure that colour schemes used are still readable when printed in monochrome.

Task 3 – Creating a presentation

Task 3 usually brings together information from the internet research 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 to promote the salons services and products. Candidates were provided with a file which contained text which might be relevant to 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 of including information about the salon services, products and reasons for buying the product. 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. Some candidates included all of the images about the salon services and products and the company logo. Many candidates failed to add any extra significant text. A significant number failed to include all the text, usually omitting 'Unisex Salon' and the company logo.

Most candidates used bullet points, centred text, bold or underline. The more interesting slides included borders and tables for the opening times. A significant number of candidates did not fill the slides so lost the mark for white space and/or size of font which was sometimes unreadable. Many candidates provided too many images. Often images and text were truncated because insufficient care had been taken in the placement and checking the layout.

Far too many slides included poor spelling and/or grammar with lack of punctuation an obvious weakness.

Many candidates failed to give an appropriate file name and instead left it as 'presentation'.

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
- selection of text/images appropriate 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
- assessing final product for fitness for audience and purpose.

Task 4 – Communication

Candidates were asked to prepare an email which could be sent to David the creative director of the hairdressing salon. They were to attach a copy of the presentation 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 David” was considered to be inappropriate for the opening of a message. It was also noted that a significant number of candidates used ‘text speak’ in this task.

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
- attaching 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 2 or 3 copies of the document – one each for Task 1a, 1b and 5a. 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 5a, candidates were asked about the risks of viruses. Many were a little vague referring to damage to the computer rather than corruption to data or files. This was worrying as there were a significant number of candidates who considered viruses to be a biological or medical problem in this context. Even some of those that understood what a virus was tended to be very vague on both marking points.

In the second part of Task 5a, candidates were asked to give one way David could minimise the risk from viruses. Many candidates produced vague or incomplete answers, buying or getting antivirus as opposed to installing and running antivirus software. Fewer answers referred to downloading materials from unreliable resources or identified file corruption as a result of virus infection. Many candidates thought accessing an unsuitable website was sufficient.

In Task 5b, was generally well attempted candidates were asked to create a new folder and move the spreadsheet and the presentation into the new folder, although some candidates did not re name the folder and left the new folder as 'new folder'.

Areas for improvement and development

- understanding the risks of viruses
- understanding how this risk of viruses could be minimised
- renaming a new folder created with relevant name.

Pass mark for FST02

Maximum mark	50
Pass mark	33
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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