Examiners' Report

January 2014

Pearson Edexcel Functional Skills ICT Level 2 (FST02)

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Introduction

Functional Skills examinations in ICT are well established, both paper based and online. The format of this paper followed all previous papers in respect of layout, content, order of tasks and degree of difficulty.

Despite innumerable past papers, mark schemes and Principal Examiners' reports being available, large numbers of candidates seem ill-prepared for the examination.   Not only were weaknesses in technical skills readily apparent, many candidates could have secured far higher marks by following and carrying out the specific instructions of the paper.

Five tasks were to be completed by candidates. All these tasks were based on a fictional organisation, Grange Literary Society and, in part, related to the Bronte sisters.

Task 1:

Task 1(a) required candidates to search the internet to find the name of the village in Yorkshire where the Bronte family lived. This information and the website used by the candidate to find the information were to be entered on the Responses document which was printed as part of the candidate's evidence.

The majority of candidates provided the requisite screen shot of a search engine within which appropriate keywords were visible but many incorporated a lower case b for Bronte which was not acceptable at this level. The recording of the source used was well evidenced by the majority of candidates.

Task 1(b) required candidates to use the internet to find the pseudonyms used by the Bronte sisters for some of their work. This part of Task 1 was very well done other than in a limited number of cases.

In addition to the lower case 'b' mentioned, other weaknesses identified, which resulted in loss of marks, included the presentation of a screenshot of the result of the search rather than the search engine and key words expected.

Areas for improvement and development:
- reading the task and instructions carefully
- acknowledging and using proper nouns correctly capitalised
- providing the requisite evidence
- differentiating between a search engine and a webpage.

Task 2:

In Task 2, candidates were given a spreadsheet comprising a worksheet of Grange Literary Society members and a second worksheet with details of fees payable based on membership type. Candidates were tasked to sort the table of members, populate the member worksheet using the information in the fees worksheet, calculate total fees, format and filter the member worksheet and create a chart from the filtered list. Large numbers of candidates found one or more of these parts of the task challenging. Marks scored on Task 2 overall were often disappointing.

In Task 2(a) most candidates were able to complete a sort of some kind, usually single column, and very few successfully sorted the entire Member worksheet into alphabetical order of Firstname within Surname. There were many examples of Firstname and/or Surname sorted as single columns with or without the whole table and several candidates incorporated the labels in their sort. Only a handful of candidates secured all 3 marks available for the sort.

Candidates were expected to use a (V)LOOKUP function in Task 2(b) to populate a column in the member worksheet using the values in the fee worksheet. This proved outside the scope of the majority of the candidates. Many candidates omitted the task entirely, devised inefficient or totally incorrect formulae or keyed in the values. A large numbers of candidates appeared to have utilised a named range in their formula but this was not always possible to confirm.

Task 2(c) required the use of =SUM to calculate the total fees. The main weakness and the primary reason for not awarding full marks for this task was the inclusion of blank rows in the formula. There were still a surprising number of candidates who attempted this calculation using =E3+E4+E5 with 40+ values. This approach is not expected at this level.

Tasks 2(b) and 2(c) required a printout in formula view to access any of the marks available. It appears that candidates either did not know how to produce a formula view or did not read the guidance in the 'evidence box', thus, irrespective of the accuracy of the calculations, none of the marks could be awarded.

Task 2(d) was worth three marks for formatting the member worksheet. These were attributed to formatting column E to £2dp, removing truncation and some enhancement of the title/column headings or use of appropriate borders. Most candidates secured all 3 marks.

Candidates were required to filter the members table in Task 2(e) and use the filtered values to generate a chart. Candidates were clearly more adept at using the filter facility than the sort as the majority secured at least one of the two marks available.   The other mark was lost because candidates frequently included 15 year olds, rather than those under 15 years of age. Most candidates presented evidence of using the filter facility as non-consecutive row headings. There were some instances of pre-prepared sorts and omitted row headings.

Task 2(f) required candidates to use the filtered data to produce a bar or column chart. There is no doubt that charts remain a weakness for many candidates; very few of the six marks available were awarded to candidates.   There were a significant number of pie charts. The selection of data proved problematic for many. Surname and age were the only expected content. Many candidates included the member's first name, junior and the fee in the category labels. A significant number of candidates created a chart of the membership fees rather than the age.

Many candidates struggle with adding a suitable title, despite the steer given in the wording of the question. Many titles were inaccurate and inappropriate. Axis labels were regularly omitted. In addition to errors and omissions of components of the chart, weaknesses in fitness for purpose included spelling and inconsistent capitalisation of labels, superfluous legends and data included on the worksheet.

Areas for improvement and development:
- sorting of one column within another
- use of LOOKUP, VLOOKUP and/or named ranges
- printing in formula view
- efficient formulae
- correct syntax
- read and follow specific instructions
- devising appropriate titles and axes labels for charts.

Task 3:

In Task 3, candidates were asked to produce a one page leaflet about the Bronte sisters using both given and sourced information. Stated criteria were that the leaflet must fit one page of A4 landscape, be formatted in columns, include the text from the data file BronteTextL2, incorporate selected images from the ImagesJan14L2 folder and include the information found by the candidate in Task 1.

Most candidates chose appropriate software. However, many candidates failed to follow the specific instructions, incorporate the requisite elements and, thus, lost marks.

Numerous candidates created multi-page leaflets and many failed to change the orientation to landscape. Large numbers of candidates created columns using text boxes rather than the software facility available. The title and the given text were usually included although many candidates omitted the heading 'The Bronte Family'. It was pleasing to note the lack of WordArt on the titles. The information sourced in Task 1 was included by the majority although some of the spellings went awry from Task 1 to Task 3 and the indicated location was not always used.

Although there were instances of the inclusion of the inappropriate images of Chartwell and Hastings Old Town, most candidates included the image of the Parsonage. However, many failed to place the image adjacent or near to the text "This image is the parsonage where they lived". The images of the three sisters appeared in most leaflets presented although not always located with related text. There were few examples of distorted images but often little thought had been given to the size of the sisters' images in relation to that of the parsonage.

As leaflets, overall presentation was weak and often haphazard. The text file comprised four paragraphs each with its own heading. Most candidates separated the sections one way or another but they were sometimes omitted, given misplaced headings and had inappropriate breaks within a section.

Little consideration was given to the use of font styles and size or other formatting features to enhance the document. Whilst the font style was usually consistent, frequently font sizes changed from section to section and innumerable candidates failed to enhance the section headings in any way. Other than some text wrapping around images there was little evidence of additional formatting features being used and few candidates gained marks in this respect.

Unfortunately very few candidates secured either of the two marks available for overall accuracy and fitness for purpose. Errors and omissions in respect of given criteria, unnecessary hyphenation of text, inconsistent alignment and line breaks were the main weaknesses identified.

Areas for improvement and development:
- following instructions in respect of page size and orientation
- following instructions in respect of incorporation of specific content
- placement of provided and sourced material
- checking for appropriateness and accuracy of content
- checking for fitness of audience and purpose.

Task 4:

Task 4 (a) required candidates to prepare an email to the Treasurer of Grange Literary Society attaching the Task 2 spreadsheet. The email address was provided. Most candidates appeared to have access to offline email software as expected and there were few instances of word processed documents being submitted for this task. However, there are still examples of personal email accounts being used; this is not acceptable.

Whilst the correct attachment was usually apparent, frequently the message was incorrectly devised with an inappropriate tone. Subject lines were often omitted and there were omitted/superfluous salutations. The most frequent reason for not awarding the second mark was the inclusion of 'Hi' or 'Hey' as the salutation; this is not acceptable in the context of Functional Skills tests.

Task 4(b) required candidates to evidence the inclusion of the Treasurer's name and email address in their address book/contact list. This task was well done by most candidates; although some omitted the task entirely and/or made typographical errors in the entered text, particularly initial capitals for Colin and Groves.

Areas for improvement and development:
- use of subject line and choice of subject
- devising appropriate message
- language and tone of message
- accuracy of entered text.

Task 5:

This task required candidates to identify two ways of making sure antivirus software is as effective as possible. Very few candidates secured both marks for this task. A large number of candidates answered this question in relation to problems associated with viruses; their effect and how to avoid them rather than concentrating on the question asked. This approach secured no marks. Frequently, the expected suggestion of 'keep the software up to date' was included but often this was repeated via alternative wording or a second, appropriate, suggestion was not included at all.

Areas for improvement and development:
- directly answering the question asked
- improved knowledge of effectiveness and use of antivirus software.

Pass Marks

Pass marks for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:
http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx

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