Examiners' Report

June 2014

Pearson Edexcel Functional Skills ICT Level 1 (FST01)

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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.

Large numbers of candidates seem ill-prepared for the examination despite past papers, mark schemes and Principal Examiners' reports being available. While weaknesses in technical skills were apparent large numbers of candidates could have secured far higher marks by not ignoring the specific instructions of the paper.

Five tasks were to be completed by candidates. All these tasks were based on a fictional organisation, Rothwell Ramblers, and related to Autumn Walks in the Yorkshire Dales.

Task 1 – Internet Research

This task required candidates to search the internet and find the current adult admission price to Ingleton Waterfalls. This information and the website from which it was retrieved were to be entered on the Responses document which was printed and submitted as part of the candidate's evidence.

The majority of candidates provided the requisite screen shot of a search engine within which appropriate key words were visible although there were a notable number of screenshots of the results of the search rather than the search itself. The price was located by the majority.

Although in this series it was not as prevalent as usual, the primary weakness in Task 1 is more often than not in mp4; provision of the URL/website used

For Task 1 of Functional Skills examinations, candidates are expected to access a website and retrieve the requisite information from within that site. In this case, the price required was not accessible on the Google return screen. Despite this, the source site used regularly quoted as google.com.

Areas for improvement and development:
- reading the task and instructions carefully
- providing the requisite evidence sourced from a web page
- differentiating between a search engine and a web page
- provision of readable screen shots.

Task 2 - Spreadsheet

A spreadsheet was provided in connection with Task 2. It comprised a single worksheet detailing Rothwell Ramblers' series of Autumn Walks. Using the spreadsheet, candidates were required to complete a range of tasks – populating cells by keying in values and calculating walking time and average distance.

Those candidates confident with spreadsheets scored very well on this task; high marks were awarded to many. Perhaps because of lack of preparation or expertise, large numbers of candidates found one or more of the parts of this task problematic. In these cases, marks scored were often very low.

Task 2(a) required candidates to enter the name of a walk (Cam Head) and two values representing the distance and difficulty rating of that walk. Most candidates completed this correctly although large numbers failed to correctly capitalise Cam Head. The expectation for task 2(b) was the use of a division and an addition in the same formula to calculate the walking time for each walk. A hint was provided to candidates utilising labels from within the provided spreadsheet. Despite its departure from the norm, this question was answered extremely well with many candidates securing all marks available. There were however many examples of inefficient formulae and incorrect syntax e.g. superfluous brackets and/or =SUM.

The use of the =AVERAGE function was expected in Task 2(c). Many candidates are clearly competent in this respect and did the requisite calculation well, although there were examples of inefficient approaches to the correct result. Calculated averages of the distance and walking time only were required; many candidates replicated their formula to include difficulty rating but failed to delete the superfluous value.

The required evidence for Tasks 2(b) and 2(c) was a printout of the spreadsheet in formulae view. Many candidates still fail to include this printout and, thus, cannot access all the marks available for the tasks.

Four marks were available in 2(d) for formatting the spreadsheet. Overall marks were poor for this task. A specific instruction was given to format two columns, C and E, with one decimal place. Either this was outside the scope of candidates or they chose to ignore it but this task was not at all well done. Large numbers of candidates formatted one or other column correctly, or all three, rather than the two expected.
For whatever reason, it is frequently the case that formatting/adding features to make the spreadsheet easy to use is ignored entirely by candidates.   A minority of candidates made good use of formatting to improve the spreadsheet, but the majority made no attempt at all to remove the truncation and/or add any bold, enlarge fonts, borders, etc. This part of the task was very disappointing.

The chart in Task 2(e) used the given distance values. Although some scored well in this task, there is no doubt that charts are a weakness for many candidates; in many cases few of the 7 marks available were awarded. A bar or column chart was expected. As usual there were some pie charts along with stacked bars, line graphs etc. The selection of appropriate data proved problematic for some; many including all the data. For whatever reason, despite the specific and directed wording of the task, devising a suitable title proved difficult for many candidates. Titles were often inaccurate and inappropriate and X and Y 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:
- devising formulae with correct syntax
- efficient formulae
- printing in formula view
- read and follow specific instructions
- devising appropriate titles and axes labels for charts
- removing superfluous legends.

Task 3 – Presentation of Information

In Task 3(a), candidates were asked to create a letter inviting members of Rothwell Ramblers to join the proposed walk to Ingleton Falls.   Stated requirements were that the letter should fit on one A4 page, portrait and include the given text, the admission price found in Task 1 and the Given logo plus one other appropriate image from those supplied. A further explicit instruction required candidates to save the letter using a meaningful file name; the name chosen was marked in Task 5.

Few candidates omitted this task entirely and most used appropriate software with the vast majority choosing word processing software. That said, many candidates failed to follow one or more of the specific instructions and incorporate the requisite elements thus denying themselves the opportunity to access several marks including fitness for purpose.

The majority of candidates used a single A4 page, portrait but there were some multi page letters presented. Most incorporated both the logo and an appropriate image but consideration of the size, proportions and positioning of these frequently left much to be desired.

Innumerable candidates appeared to have little knowledge/understanding of letter layout and/or conventions.   Most candidates included the date in the position indicated but there was a huge variation in formats used and many candidates included the day as well as the date. Few candidates enhanced the organisation name and a wide range of mixed fonts and sizes was encountered whereas consistency within the document would be expected.

Although the entire contents of the provided text file were required to be included, the email address was frequently omitted. Replacing the bracketed text with the price from task 1 proved problematic for some with a significant number of candidates replacing/deleting some of the provided text in the process.

The use of any additional, effective, formatting techniques – bullets, justification of the letter, wrapping of images was minimal and restricted to bold and/or the occasional underline.

Perhaps, because of a lack of understanding of the conventions used in a letter, few candidates secured the accuracy/consistency mark. Frequently, there were issues with line spacing within and between paragraphs and innumerable candidates failed to provided adequate space for a signature.

Overall, marks awarded for Task 3(a) were disappointing.

Task 3(b) required candidates to use software facilities to make the letter 'read only' and produce a screen shot to show they had carried this out. The approach to this task and resulting marks awarded was noticeably centre-based. [Read Only] was evidenced well across entire cohorts but there were innumerable examples of the task not being attempted or screenshots evidencing only part completed processes.

Areas for improvement and development:

- awareness of letter layout and conventions
- incorporating requisite elements as per the test paper criteria
- using software facilities to make a document 'Read Only'
- completing the process and checking fitness for purpose.

Task 4 - Communication: preparing an email

Task 4 (a) required candidates to prepare an email to Andrea Knight attaching a copy of the Task 3 letter. The email address to be used was provided. Overall, candidates' attempts at task 4 are improving.

Most candidates appeared to have access to offline email software or simulations as expected although there were a few instances of word processed documents being submitted for this task. There was still significant evidence of candidates using personal email accounts; this is not acceptable and contravenes the Instructions for the Conduct of the Exam (ICE).

Although sometimes difficult to decipher because of poor quality screen shots, the addressee details were usually reproduced correctly – although the final r was frequently omitted - and the correct attachment included. The subject line still proves problematic for many candidates. Often these are omitted entirely and/or the subject chosen bears little resemblance to the document attached/email content.

Devising an appropriate message proves outside the scope of some candidates. At this level it is not necessary to expand and invent content; candidates can take their steer – and wording – from the task itself. By rewording many candidates failed to make the necessary point – 'asking Andrea to send the letter to members who have email'.

As always, the main reason the 'appropriate business salutation and tone' mark was not awarded was the inclusion of 'Hi' or 'Hey' or incorrect capitalisation of proper names. There was little use of 'text speak' at this series but many candidates seem unfamiliar with 'business tone' and the quality of spelling and grammar within the email messages was often poor.

Areas for improvement and development:
- use of subject line and choice of subject
- devising appropriate message
- using appropriate salutations
- language and tone of message
- accuracy of entered text
- provision of readable screen shots.

Task 5 – Using ICT

This task required candidates to create a new folder called 'RR Autumn Walks', move the letter into that folder and produce a screen shot to evidence the two processes.

The majority of candidates secured both of the first two marks available although there were instances of incorrect capitalisation of the folder name and/or moving the wrong document.

The third mark available was for the use of a suitable/meaningful file name on the letter; many of the names used were ill conceived and inappropriate.

Areas for improvement and development:
- correct naming of new folder, including capitalisation
- use of suitable and meaningful file names for created documents.

Pass Marks

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