

Examiners' Report

March 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.

Despite past papers, mark schemes and Principal Examiners' reports being available, a large number of candidates were unable to demonstrate the technical skills required to achieve a pass at this level. In addition, candidates could have secured 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 Book Club, and related to an event being held in Whitby.

Task 1:

This task required candidates to search the internet and find the address and postcode of a specific hotel – the Bagdale Hall Hotel – in Whitby. 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. That said, a considerable number of candidates still submit the results of the search rather than the search itself.

The hotel address was located by the majority although this was problematic. For Task 1 of the Functional Skills examinations, candidates are expected to access a website and retrieve the requisite information from within that site. Many candidates clearly use the Google return screen for their details rather than accessing a website. In this case, the address was incomplete on the Google screen and thus the mark for the address could not be secured. The source site used was well evidenced by most candidates although the Google URL is still often quoted.

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:

A spreadsheet datafile was given to the candidates in connection with task 2. The spreadsheet comprised a single worksheet containing details of membership of Grange Book Club. The candidates were required to populate cells by keying in values, add a suitable row label, calculate total membership numbers and total income from fees paid.

Confident candidates scored very well on this task; full marks were awarded to a few. 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 four values representing 2013 membership numbers. Virtually all candidates completed this correctly and secured all 3 marks.

In task 2(b) candidates were expected to use an =SUM function to generate the total number of each type of membership. The row to use for the formula was identified in the question. Candidates were then required to enter a suitable label (relating to the total calculated) in a specific cell. Most candidates gained two or three of the four marks available, a significant number secured all four marks.

Evidence for this task was a printout of the spreadsheet in formulae view. It was good to note that the vast majority of candidates submitted a formula view printout at this series. Most candidates used an effective =SUM function; a lower number than usual using the inefficient cell + cell approach. However, a large proportion of the candidates included the blank row in their formula. Most placed it in the specified row as asked.

The range of labels used was wide. Whilst the majority described the type of data displayed, i.e. membership fees, a recurring error was the failure to include or imply a total. Few candidates failed to enter any label at all.

Task 2(c) required candidates to calculate the total income for each type of membership. The two row labels to use were clearly indicated in the question; a simple formula that multiplied two cells by each other was required. Again, a formula view printout was the required evidence. Large numbers of candidates either failed to understand the instructions or were unable to devise a cell * cell formula. There were innumerable examples of a second =SUM being used inefficiently.

For the final mark in Task 2(c) both formula (the =SUM in 2(b) and the multiplication in 2(c)) were required to be replicated across all four columns. The vast majority of candidates evidenced this well.

For this part of the task there were instances of missing formula printouts and thus marks were not accessible.

Three marks were available in Task 2(d) for formatting the worksheet. Overall marks were poor for this task, few scored well. Most candidates demonstrated their ability to format values to £2dp although there were some mixed numbers of decimal places. However, large numbers of candidates failed to discriminate the figures and formatted all values rather than only the eight specific currency values.

A minority of candidates made good use of formatting to improve the spreadsheet, with the majority making no attempt at any formatting at all. Although 'bold' was often used effectively, there were few examples of other formatting techniques and, overall, this part of the task was very disappointing.

The chart in Task 2(e) used the calculated total income from membership fees. 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 seven 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 many; many using the total number of members rather than the income values and others selecting the correct numeric values but failing to include the category labels.

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 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:

- printing in formula view
- use of =SUM with a specific range
- devising cell * cell formulae
- efficient formulae
- correct syntax
- read and follow specific instructions
- devising appropriate titles and axes labels for charts
- removing superfluous legends.

Task 3:

Task 3(a) required candidates to produce a five slide presentation about a fictitious event using both provided and sourced information. Stated requirements were that the presentation should have a title slide and four other slides; include the logo on the title slide only; incorporate one other image from ImagesMar14L1 on slides 2, 3 and 4 only and correctly place the address and postcode retrieved in Task 1. Further explicit instructions required candidates to print the presentation with two slides per page.

Few candidates omitted this task entirely and most used appropriate software. However, many candidates failed to follow one or more of the specific instructions and incorporate the requisite elements. Whilst the majority created a presentation of five slides only, the requirement to print two slides per page was ignored by many.

The majority of candidates placed all the correct information onto the slides, but consideration of the layout, audience and purpose of these presentations left a lot to be desired. More often than not the logo was correctly placed on the title slide and most candidates adhered to the requirement to include one image only on slides 2, 3 and 4. There were though instances of more than one image on the slides, images on slide 5, wrongly chosen images and, in a few cases, incorporation of other images than those provided. In the majority of presentations the images were well positioned and there were few instances of distortion and/or changed proportions.

The original text file is expected to be copied and pasted into the candidate's document as provided and then titles and superfluous sub headings removed. Many candidates changed the textual content, adding and/or removing parts; changed the capitalisation etc. This approach seldom benefits the candidate and is to be discouraged.

Most candidates correctly placed the retrieved address and postcode but it was disappointing to note the frequency of capitalisation and typographical errors occurring in the input.

The title slide was poorly devised by many candidates; little thought being given to its presentation. In many cases, the event name and date were far too small to be read and/or suitable as a title slide and regularly candidates incorporated continuous text rather than the three separate and distinct lines/phrases provided. Most candidates retained the four slide titles as provided although many failed to enhance them in any way whatsoever or differentiate them from the narrative content.

Font usage was generally very good, with most candidates sticking to just one font style throughout. However, as always, there were a few examples of inappropriate illegible fonts.

Overall, few candidates seemed to have put much thought into the design of their presentation, with an over-reliance on the software facilities and templates being apparent. As a result it was often difficult to award the marks available for consistent and effective use of formatting features. The consistent sizing and placement of the images on slides 2-5 was frequently the only awardable content in this respect.

It was an apparent anomaly that the fitness for purpose mark was available without candidates undertaking additional formatting. The main reason for this mark not being awarded was usually omissions/errors in following instruction and incorporation of requisite content.

Task 3(b) required candidates to identify two ways to stop people making changes to the prepared presentation. Short written answers in the responses document were required.

This task was generally well answered and many candidates secured both marks. Most candidates were able to identify at least one way to prevent the presentation being changed with 'password protect' and 'read only' being the most popular responses. However, some candidates struggled to provide any correct answer and a small number did not even attempt this task.

Many candidates provided totally irrelevant answers with many referring to the computer system rather than the document. A significant number of candidates offered the most common incorrect answer - save it in a safe place such as a memory stick.

Areas for improvement and development:

- following instructions in respect of software to be used
- following instructions in respect of printouts – slides per page
- following instructions in respect of incorporation of specific content
- retaining text file as provided
- placement of provided and sourced material
- checking for appropriateness and accuracy of content
- checking for fitness of audience and purpose
- devising written answers to questions asked.

Task 4:

Task 4(a) required candidates to prepare an email to Harvey Tillman attaching a copy of the Task 3 presentation. The email address was provided. It is pleasing to report that this task was often very well done; many candidates securing full marks.

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 were though still a considerable number of examples of personal email accounts being used; this is not acceptable.

Although sometimes difficult to decipher because of poorly produced screen shots, the addressee details were usually copied correctly and the correct attachment included. Subject lines are omitted entirely by some candidates but, in this case, the word 'presentation' was commonly included and entirely appropriate.

Devising a message proves outside the scope of many candidates. At this level it is not necessary to rewrite and/or reword the question; candidate can take their steer – and wording – from the task itself. By rewording many candidates failed to make the necessary point – 'asking Harvey to check that the presentation is fit for purpose'.

As always, the main reason the 'appropriate business salutation and tone' mark was not awarded was the inclusion of 'Hi' or 'Hey' in the salutation; this is not acceptable in the context of FST exams. 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:

This task required candidates to create a new folder called Whitby Event, move the presentation into that folder and produce a screen shot to evidence the two processes.

The majority of candidates secured both marks available. Incorrect capitalisation of the folder name was the main reason for any loss of marks on this task.

Areas for improvement and development:

- correct naming of new folder, including capitalisation.

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>

