Examiners' Report

January 2016

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, innumerable candidates could have secured far higher marks by simply following the specific instructions of the paper rather than interpreting them.

Five tasks were to be completed by candidates. All these tasks were based on a fictional music group, LyKaQu.

Task 1 – Internet Research

This task required candidates to search the internet and find the date that John Lee Hooker died. 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. A correct date was located by most candidates.

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 value required was often accessible on the Google return screen and the source site regularly quoted, incorrectly, as Google.com.

Areas for improvement and development:
- reading the task and instructions carefully
- accessing a webpage to retrieve information
- providing the requisite evidence sourced from a web page
- differentiating between a search engine and a web page in respect of source location
- providing readable screen shots.

Task 2 – Spreadsheet

A spreadsheet was provided to the candidates in connection with task 2. The spreadsheet comprised a single worksheet detailing tickets sales for Laykaqu's forthcoming tour. Candidates were required to use the spreadsheet to populate cells by keying in values and calculate unsold tickets and two averages. 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 a given value into a specific (empty) cell. Most candidates completed this correctly. In task 2(b) a simple subtraction was required to calculate the number of tickets remaining unsold at each venue. Most candidates successfully calculated the answers but there were many examples of the unnecessary use of =SUM. The use of the =AVERAGE function was expected in 2(c) with 3 marks available for its correct use across the correct range of cells. 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 with a significant number including the blank row in their cell range.

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 such a printout and cannot access all the marks available for the tasks.

Three marks were available in 2(d) for formatting the spreadsheet. Overall marks were poor for this task. A specific instruction was given to format the dates in column A to a consistent format. Either this was outside the scope of candidates or they chose to ignore it but this task was not at all well done. For whatever reason, it is frequently the case that formatting or 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, gridlines etc. Outcomes for this part of the task were very disappointing.

Task 2(e) required candidates to sort the data into date order. This proved far outside the scope of many candidates and the task was totally ignored by the majority.

The chart in 2(f) used the given values of tickets sold. Although some scored reasonably 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. The selection of appropriate data proved problematic for some; many including all the data and/or ignoring the venue and selecting the dates for the x axis. Despite the specific and direct 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. 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:
- using formulae with correct syntax
- efficient formulae
- printing in formula view
- reading and following specific instructions
- formatting data consistently
- enhancing headings and labels consistently to facilitate ease of reading
- sorting on a single column and the whole table
- devising appropriate titles and axes labels for charts
- removing superfluous legends.

Task 3 – Presenting Information

In task 3(a), candidates were asked to produce a CD cover for Lykaqu's forthcoming album. Given requirements were that the back and front must be square, the same size and side by side on one A4 page, landscape. Candidates were instructed to include the given text, a stated selling price, a barcode image plus two other appropriate images from those supplied together with the information found in Task 1.

Few candidates omitted this task entirely and most used appropriate software with the vast majority choosing word processing or publishing software; there were though examples of the use of presentation software. Notwithstanding this, many candidates failed to follow one or more of the specific instructions and incorporate the requisite elements thus preventing them from accessing several marks including those for fitness for purpose.

Whilst the majority of candidates used a single A4 page, landscape there were numerous two-page CD covers submitted. Producing two components square and the same size proved beyond the ability of many; often candidates met the side by side requirement through 'splitting' the page into 2 x A5. A surprising number of candidates did not include all the provided text but most incorporated both the barcode and two appropriate images. That said, consideration of the size, proportions and positioning of these frequently left much to be desired especially when candidates attempted to place the images under the text.

Most candidates included the date (retrieved from Task 1) in the position indicated but there were examples of the omission of text and/or inclusion or superfluous content around the insertion point. A notable number of candidates omitted the given selling price entirely; there was little consideration of its location by some of those who did include it. Few candidates enhanced the group's name and the use of additional, effective, formatting techniques – bullets, numbers, autoshapes, watermarking of images - was minimal and often limited to centring.

Areas for improvement and development:
- understanding document layout / conventions
- devising specific matching shapes
- incorporating requisite elements.

In Task 3(b), candidates were asked to identify two ways of preventing others changing a document (in this case the CD cover) accidentally or on purpose. An example, read only, was given in the question.

A surprising number of candidates gave 'read only' as one of their answers. The most commonly occurring suggestion was password protection but clearly many candidates have a limited knowledge of the range of alternatives available.
Areas for improvement and development:
- reading the task and instructions carefully

- identification of alternative means of protecting a document against amendment.

Task 4 – Email

Task 4 required candidates to prepare an email to Peppe (LykaQu's manager) attaching a copy of the Task 3 CD cover. The email address to be used was given. Undoubtedly, candidates' attempts at this type of task are improving but there are recurring issues. 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. In this series, it was good to note that there were very few instances of personal email accounts being used.   Use of these accounts is not acceptable.

Although sometimes difficult to decipher because of ill-prepared screen shots, the addressee details were usually reproduced correctly and, in most cases, the correct attachment was included. The subject of this email, the CD cover, was relatively straightforward for most candidates.

Despite the clear direction provided in the question, devising an appropriate message proves outside the scope of many 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 often failed to make the necessary point - 'asking Peppe to check that the CD cover is ready for printing'.

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:
- devising appropriate message
- using appropriate salutations
- using language and tone in the message
- entering text accurately
- producing readable screen shots

Task 5 - Using ICT

This task required candidates to create a new folder called **2016 Tour**, move both the spreadsheet and CD cover files into that folder and produce a screen shot to evidence the two processes.

Many candidates secured both marks available. Most of the created folders had the correct content but there were countless instances of incorrect capitalisation of Tour.

Area for improvement and development:
- naming a new folder correctly as given , including capitalisation.

Pass Marks

Pass marks for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:
http://qualifications.pearson.com/en/support/support-topics/results-certification/grade-boundaries.html?Qualification-Family=functional-skills