Examiners' Report

June 2017

Pearson Edexcel Functional Skills ICT Level 2 (FST02)

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Introduction

These Functional Skills Level 2 tests have been running since 2010. Some of the issues reported in previous series were still evident in responses seen during this series. A small number of candidates seem poorly prepared for the test. This is particularly the case for the spreadsheet task. A pass in the test is intended to be approximately equivalent to the Grade B standard in GCSE. Responses from candidates in this examination do not always reflect this standard.

It is a requirement of this test that candidates should only have access to the internet during the first 15 minutes of the test. Relevant members of staff in a small number of Centres appear to be unaware of this stipulation. Centres need to ensure that candidates are reminded that there could be serious consequences if they are found to be breaching the code of conduct.

Facilities for offline email should be available for candidates to use during the test. There are some centres where the use of students' personal email accounts (e.g. Hotmail, Yahoo mail etc) was evident in the screenshots submitted. There was also some evidence seen in pupil responses that new user accounts are not being set up and data files from previous series were present. It should also be noted that ALL items in email clients used for the test should have been cleared before the start of the examination week.

It is a requirement that separate user areas, not accessible to candidates outside their sitting of the test, should be prepared before the test. Centres must provide the appropriate facilities for candidates to complete all tasks within the specification. 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. Further guidance on email and internet access is available from Edexcel if required.

Another general issue that examiners often mention is that the majority of candidates at some centres do not submit their work in accordance with the instruction on Page 2 of the Cover Sheet. It is sometimes difficult for the examiner to access the work where candidates have not included the pages in the correct order or punched holes in the wrong place in their work.

There were, as usual, five tasks to be completed during the test. These were based on a scenario about a dog training organisation and their visit to Crufts Dog Show in 2018.

Task 1 – Internet research

This task was generally well completed by candidates. In this series, candidates were asked to use the internet to find an image and some information about Crufts Dog Show and the Kennel Club.

In Task 1(a), candidates generally succeeded in using a search engine to find the date of the 2018 show. Where marks were lost, it was due to one or more of the following:

- failure to include the screenshot of the search engine
- unreadable criteria – often due to screenshots which were too small or cropped too much
- incorrect or incomplete date range for the event
- use of the search engine or derivative URL rather than the correct source URL for the information.

In Task 1(b), candidates were mostly successful in obtaining an image of the Best in Show from 2016 and the website address of The Kennel Club.

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 correctly the source of information and images.

Task 2 – Spreadsheet

There were 7 sub-tasks for the spreadsheet activity. Candidates were presented with data about payments for the hotel costs for the visit to the 2018 dog show. Candidates were asked to calculate:

- the total paid during the previous six months
- the cost of the hotel using a spreadsheet function
- the balance to pay.

They were then asked to use a spreadsheet function (=IF), to display 'yes' or 'no' depending on whether the balance to pay was £120 or more. Candidates were then required to sort the table using multiple columns and format the spreadsheet before producing a chart to display the balance to pay for each member of the group.

It has been noted that candidates in this series have performed better than in earlier series in using spreadsheet functions for (V)LOOKUP and conditional statements. However, there is still frequent and inappropriate use of the =SUM function in simple arithmetic calculations (in this test, for example, in the calculation of the balance to pay) and failure to use appropriate absolute cell references (in the LOOKUP range).

These sub-tasks required the printing of the formula view of the spreadsheet. It is very disappointing to see how often the majority of candidates at a small number of centres did not produce a formula view of the spreadsheet. Centres should inform candidates that annotating the spreadsheet with the formula will not gain the marks for the formula. Many candidates at a small number of centres provided several screenshots of the spreadsheet so that some formulae could be credited from the formula bar. However this is not recommended and is unnecessary when the formula view is so easily produced (CTRL + ` on Microsoft Windows systems). Candidates should also be reminded to ensure that the formulae are visible in full. Examiners report that often the correct formula is used (as seen from the results in the data view) but the complete formula is not available to enable full credit to be given.

The sorting of the data was not well done. A lot of scripts were seen where candidates sorted only the first two columns in the table so that the table of data became mixed up. Data integrity is a critical feature of functionality in sorting a table of data.

Formatting the spreadsheet was generally well done. Some candidates did not gain credit because their use of borders and shading did not enhance the presentation of the data. Vertical shading is rarely effective when much of spreadsheet work relies on reading across the rows. It was also noted that candidates who did not gain full marks had not read/followed the instruction to format the currency to 0 decimal places.

Candidates were asked to produce a chart to show the balance to pay. Most candidates produced the expected bar/column chart with the appropriate data. However, a number of candidates failed to include appropriate titles and

axis labels. The more successful candidates used the wording of the question to provide a suitable title. Many candidates seemed to rely too much on the default title provided by the software ('Balance to Pay') and so did not include key words from the question (eg 'member').

Areas for improvement and development: (not all these were assessed on this occasion)

- formatting a spreadsheet
  - currency
  - decimal places
  - appropriate borders and shading
  - word wrapping
  - appropriate row heights and column widths
  - use of text formatting to enhance visual clarity e.g. bold, italics, font size
- using formulae
  - simple formulae using arithmetic symbols (+, -, / and *) [without using the SUM function]
  - using functions e.g. SUM, IF, MAX, MIN and VLOOKUP/LOOKUP where appropriate
  - using efficient formulae (eg using SUM for adding up a range of cells)
  - using absolute and relative cell references
- sorting and filtering
  - on one column
  - on multiple columns (secondary sorting or sorting within a sort)
  - expanding selection to include full table in a sort
  - using appropriate filters to show selected data from a table
- charts
  - pie charts, line graphs and column or bar charts with one or more series of data
  - understanding the appropriateness of different chart types
  - inserting a suitable title on the chart
  - using legends where appropriate and removing unnecessary legends (for single series charts)
  - axis labels where relevant
- printing
  - printing in data view
  - printing in formula view
  - ensuring that cell contents are not truncated in printouts
  - adding footers with candidate details
  - fitting a spreadsheet to one page
  - making sure that colour schemes used are still readable when printed in monochrome.

Task 3 – Presenting information

Task 3 usually brings together information from the internet research, the spreadsheet task and text and images from the data files to create a product aimed at a particular audience. Often the candidates will be expected to select appropriate text and images to produce an integrated document.

In this series, candidates were asked to produce an information sheet using the text file, the images folder and answers obtained from the internet research. They were required to format the 'Breed Winners' as a table.

Most candidates were able to insert the required information in appropriate locations. Some very attractive information sheets were produced but sadly did not gain full marks because they did not include all the required elements. Candidates should be advised to check carefully that they have fulfilled the requirements identified in the question paper. At Level 2, it is expected that candidates will be able to use the proofing tools within the software to produce documents which are largely error free.

Many candidates also lost marks due to poor layout skills with images randomly arranged with no apparent connection to the text. Often the images were truncated or overlapped text. Also it was observed by examiners that the logo image sometimes dominated the information sheet with the other images much reduced in size. These issues often resulted in candidates losing fitness for purpose marks.

As is usual with this qualification, candidates are expected to be able to select appropriate items from the data file.

Areas for improvement and development: (not all these were assessed on this occasion)
- selection of appropriate software for producing an on-screen or paper-based presentation of information
- integration of information from a variety of sources including text, images, tables and graphs
- consideration of suitability in selection of text/images for an audience and purpose
- use of formatting techniques appropriately:
  - text enhancements – bold, italic, underline, font sizes
  - selection of font styles
  - selection of suitable font sizes for a document
  - hyphenation
  - text wrap and alignment
  - checking for consistency in font sizes and styles
- checking the printout for truncation of text and/or images
- checking that all the criteria stated in the question paper have been met
- consideration of fitness for purpose
- consideration of audience.

Task 4 – Communication: preparing an email

Candidates were asked to prepare an email with a suitable subject and an attachment. The quality of work for this task, particularly in the copying of email addresses and the content of the message is too often below the standard expected at Level 2.

Several candidates do not appear to check that email addresses are entered correctly. Since incorrect email addresses will not reach their intended recipient, this is a critical aspect of functionality in this task.

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" and "Hey" are considered to be inappropriate ways to address business email messages. The expectation at Level 2 is an appropriate salutation followed by an accurate, concise message which meets the criteria in the question paper.

It was also noted by examiners that several candidates did not read the question paper correctly and attached the information sheet and requested feedback on the quality of this document. It would seem that such candidates have become so accustomed to attaching the document from Task 3 (which has been asked for quite frequently in previous series), that they failed to read the question which required the attachment of the spreadsheet. Another area which suggested that candidates were not reading the paper carefully was in producing a message to remind Tracey about the final payment rather than asking her to send a message to members to remind them.

Many examiners continue to comment on candidates who fail to gain marks because the screenshot evidence provided is not readable. Candidates are expected to check the printout of their work to ensure that examiners will be able to read the contents – especially email addresses, subject lines and attachment details. This is mentioned in the evidence box on the paper.

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 or sent boxes.

Some examiners have reported that candidates at some centres do not appear to have access to an offline mail client and produce 'emails' in word processing software. Since these do not provide suitable evidence of attachments or ability to use email, centres which do not provide the candidates with offline email clients are penalising their candidates unnecessarily. There are many 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 available on the Frequently Asked Questions section of the Edexcel Functional Skills website.

Areas for improvement and development:
- selection of appropriate <u>offline</u> email client software
- careful copying of text from the question paper
- accurate copying of email addresses
- attachment of correct files to an email
- using a suitable subject line for an email
- producing a simple concise message which meets the criteria in the instructions
- using appropriate language for business email messages
- ensuring that screen shot evidence is readable.

Task 5 – Using ICT

Often responses to Task 5 are usually entered at the end of the Responses document used for Task 1. Many candidates print out and include multiple copies of the Responses document. 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 this series, candidates were asked to answer questions about dealing with attachments from unknown senders and copyright issues. There were many candidates who gained full marks in Task 5. Where candidates lost marks, it was often because they had produced answers that were too vague or not appropriate (for example, not opening the attachment which was not credited because it was mentioned in the paper).

Areas for improvement and development:

- taking appropriate action to avoid risks of virus infection
- ability to identify actions to take to avoid breaches of copyright legislation in using images from the Internet.

Pass mark for FST02 in June 2017

Maximum mark	50
Pass mark	36
UMS mark	6