

Examiners' Report

January 2018

Pearson Edexcel Functional Skills
ICT Level 1 (FST01)

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Introduction

The functional skills specification and examinations are firmly established. This paper reflected the content, layout and degree of difficulty of all previous papers both paper-based and online. Despite various support materials being published and available to centres, many of the learners appeared ill-prepared for the examination without the necessary knowledge or skills to access the tasks. Although there was a handful of high end scores, the quality of work from the majority was weak and disappointing with tasks frequently omitted entirely.

Many learners appear to have problems understanding the instructions for collating their work. Scripts were submitted with holes incorrectly punched, upside down, incorrectly ordered etc. Centre based supervision and/or preparation would alleviate such issues and undoubtedly facilitate the marking activity. The requirements are clearly set out on page two of the Cover Sheet.

There were five tasks to be completed by learners based on a fictional theatre group and their planned production of West Side Story. Innumerable learners could have secured far higher marks – and a pass grade - by simply following and carrying out the specific instructions in the paper.

Task 1 – Internet Research

Learners were required to search the internet and find the name of the person who wrote West Side Story. The name and the website from which it was retrieved were to be entered on the Responses document which was printed as part of the learner's evidence. As is the case with all Functional Skills ICT tests, the information (in this case a name) was required for use in Task 3.

Large numbers of learners provided the requisite screen shot of a search engine within which appropriate key words were visible and recorded a name and the source used. Unfortunately, the name included within the Responses document was frequently incorrect. This was often due to inaccurate reproduction of the task requirements in the search engine key words. Further, all too often, learners reproduce the Google returned value without question rather than accessing a website, reading the content and relating their answer to the Task 3 text file as expected. Many learners quoted Wikipedia as their source URL yet on that site the correct answer (Arthur Laurents) appeared within the very first sentence.

As always, some learners presented a screen shot of the result of the search rather than the search engine and key words and it was disappointing, yet again, to note the numbers of learners recording the search engine as their source for the information.

Areas for improvement and development:

- reading the task and instructions carefully
- differentiating between a search engine and a web page
- discriminatory filtering of results to provide the requisite evidence.

Task 2 – Spreadsheet

A spreadsheet was provided for the learners to use in Task 2. The spreadsheet provided details of amounts to pay and payments received in respect of families going on a planned theatre trip. The main requirements of the task were to enter a value into a specific cell; calculate values using addition, subtraction and multiplication; replicate formulae; format the spreadsheet and create a bar chart to display the March payment for each family. Although some learners scored well on this task, many learners seemd to have limited spreadsheet skills.

Most learners entered the single value into the correct (empty) cell on the spreadsheet and thus secured both marks for 2(a). There were instances of the value being omitted or overlooked entirely but few learners misplaced it. Large numbers failed to produce a printout displaying formulae, so were seriously disadvantaged in terms of the number of marks they could access in sections 2(b), 2(c) and 2(d) of the task.

Tasks 2(b) (i), (ii) and (iii) involved using single cell formulae to generate values. Although the calculations were all single cell only, it was disappointing to note the frequency of unnecessary use of functions such as =SUM and =PRODUCT. Some of the marks within this task were accessible without a formula view of the spreadsheet but it is not possible to check replication of formulae without this.

Task 2(c) required learners to total four adjacent values representing the various amounts already paid by each family. The formula =SUM(B15:E15) was all that was required yet the =B15+C15+D15 etc approach was often seen as was =SUM(B15+C15+D15, etc). Some of the values were zero and it was disappointing to note the number of learners who chose to omit those cell references. This meant they were not able to secure the replication mark. A clear prompt was provided in the question paper in respect of the location of values to be used in 2(d) where a single cell subtraction, =H5-F15, was required. Again, the unnecessary use of =SUM was often seen.

There was a specific instruction to format all currency values to £ with two decimal places in 2(e)(i). Most learners accessed both marks available but some failed to discriminate the values chosen and formatted the number of adults and juniors travelling as well as the currency values.

As in previous series, a substantial number of learners ignored task 2(e)(ii) altogether, did not include any additional formatting and thus failed to secure the mark available. Enhancement of the main and sub-headings and/or the addition of borders were the main features used by those who did add formatting.

Task 2(f) required learners to create a bar chart to display the March payment for each family using the values calculated in 2(d)(i). Few learners scored well on this task. Although a handful of pie charts were seen, the majority of learners used the correct data and created a bar chart as expected. Despite the wording of the task and clear indication of an

appropriate title, frequently learners omitted a title entirely and many titles were incomplete or inappropriate. It was disappointing to note the frequency with which March was reproduced with a lower case m. Most legends were removed as expected, but often axis labels were omitted or inaccurate.

Areas for improvement and development:

- printing in formula view
- efficient formulae
- correct syntax
- check legibility and content of printouts
- appropriate and effective formatting
- selecting specific data
- devising appropriate charts correctly labelled with titles and legends.

Task 3 – Presentation of information

For Task 3(a), learners were asked to create a flyer to let young people know about the forthcoming auditions for West Side Story. Learners were required to include: the text from the given file FlyerTextL1, the name retrieved from the internet in Task 1, the logo and two other images selected from the ImagesJan18L1 folder.

Although there were some very good attempts for this task and some reasonable marks secured, the autonomy this task offers seemed outside the scope and skillset of many learners.

Few learners omitted the task entirely and most used the appropriate word processing or DTP software but there were a few flyers created in presentation software. Despite the specific instruction to use one page of A4 portrait, there were instances of two page documents.

Most, but not all, learners secured the marks for incorporating the provided title and text, retrieved name, logo and images as expected but there were notable errors and omissions. The most frequently recurring issues were the inclusion of the word 'Title' and the failure to insert the retrieved information in the appropriate location. Most logos were at the top or bottom, but some were inappropriately placed in the middle of the text. Some top edges were cropped by margins and a few were distorted. Although there were no specific locations for the included images, the sizes of these – and especially in relation to the logo – was regularly ill considered with many far too small.

The overall presentation of the flyers was disappointing. Learners were asked to add formatting 'to make sure the important information stands out'. Many learners failed to consider this at all and innumerable flyers used a single font and point size with no formatting whatsoever. Bullets and borders were the formatting facilities most commonly used where enhancements had been made. Very few learners secured the fitness for purpose mark due, usually, to omitted content.

Areas for improvement and development:

- following instructions in respect of incorporating provided and sourced material
- incorporation of consistent and effective formatting.

Task 3(b), using the Responses document to record their answers, task 3(b)(i) required learners to suggest a strong password for the flyer and 3(b)(ii) asked for a reason why their suggested password was strong. All too frequently the suggestions in 3(b)(i), although often including both letters and numbers, comprised or included complete and recognisable words which meant the mark could not be awarded. Learners should be taught that strong passwords will not include a recognisable name, personal information or a recognisable word as well as including upper and lower case letters, numeric characters and symbols.

It was encouraging to note that the reasons, 3(b)(ii), were theoretically correct although did not always accurately reflect the features of the suggested password in 3(b)(i). These answers were rewarded at this series.

Areas for improvement and development:

- devising a strong password mapped to recognised features of such a password
- knowledge of a range of features of a strong password.

Task 4 – Communication: preparing an email

Task 4 required learners to email the flyer created in Task 3 as an attachment to Lloyd Davies, the secretary of Ranley Youth Theatre. The email address to be used was provided. A small number of word processed documents were submitted this series, but most learners appeared to have access to offline email software as expected. There were few examples of the use of personal email accounts.

Most learners scored reasonably well on this task but as always there were examples of careless and erroneous reproduction of the address and inaccurate or incomplete subject lines. There were instances of the attachment being omitted entirely or the wrong document chosen; in some cases, the full flyer was included within the body of the email.

Most learners included both elements in their message - asking Lloyd to send the flyer to all (local) schools and sixth form colleges, but it was disappointing to note the frequent inaccuracies in the phrase 'sixth form colleges'. Some of the language and tone of the messages was totally inappropriate and out of context; there were omitted/superfluous salutations. Hi and Hey were used regularly and a handful of learners used text speak or lower-case i.

Areas for improvement and development:

- copying the addressee details as given
- use of subject line and choice of subject
- devising appropriate message
- language and tone of message
- producing a screen shot of a sufficient size to enable it to be read.

Task 5 - Using ICT

Addressing Skill Standard 2, sub-section 2.3, Task 5 required learners to use the Responses document to record a written answer to a question about a non-functioning desktop icon.

Omitted entirely by many, this question was very poorly answered and proved outside the knowledge and understanding of the majority of learners; very few marks were awarded to any answer. Learners should be taught to read the context of the questions carefully and to make sure that their answers are accurate in that context rather than generating 'standard' answers that are not relevant.

Areas for improvement and development:

- knowledge and use of a range of user interactions with a computer
- knowledge and use, including adjustment, of system settings
- devising a phrase/sentence to answer a written question.

Pass mark for FST01 in January 2018

Maximum mark	50
Pass mark	36
UMS mark	6

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