GCSE 2004

January Series

ASSESSMENT and
QUALIFICATIONS
ALLIANCE

Report on the Examination

Applied Information and Communication Technology (Double Award)

■ Unit 3 ICT and Society

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Unit 3

Introduction

This was the second opportunity for centres to enter candidates for the externally assessed unit, and the size of the entry showed a considerable increase over last summer's cohort, with nearly 4 000 candidates being entered. It was disappointing, however, that around 500 of those candidates were either withdrawn by their centres or did not submit an assignment.

Although there was an increase in the presentation quality of the evidence submitted by candidates in this sitting, examiners were again disappointed by the quality of the content of many candidates' work, and felt unable to award more than a minimal number of grades at C or above. Again, no candidates provided evidence to satisfy the requirements for grades A or A*.

Although in the main candidates demonstrated a greater level of knowledge and awareness of the basic ICT relevant to the unit, most had great difficulty in relating that knowledge and awareness directly to the areas of society identified in the specification. It is that higher-level skill which identifies the successful Applied ICT GCSE candidate.

It is often the case that candidates do not perform well in the first sittings of any new examination, as centres need to gain familiarity with the requirements of the new specification. To help this process, there have been a number of teachers' standardisation meetings held over the past three years, and a further range will be held during 2004. Centres are very strongly encouraged to send a representative to these meetings, and to cascade information received to colleagues back in the centre. Portfolio advisers and members of the senior examining team are available to lead training sessions in centres for groups of staff. Details of the arrangements and costs of such sessions are available from AQA's ICT Subject Office in Manchester.

Assignment Presentation

The quality of presentation of candidates' assignments was generally improved over the summer 2003 sitting, and the differences in standards tended to be centre-related. Assignments from many centres were well presented, with candidates' evidence presented in a logical sequence, with pages numbered consecutively and the three tasks clearly divided. This made the marking process easier for the examiner, as well as completion of the assignments a more satisfying event for the candidate. Some centres, however, presented assignments that were poorly organised and evidence was very difficult to locate. A number of candidates were allowed, despite earlier requests to the contrary, to use plastic wallets. Centres are reminded that these should not be used to enclose candidates' work.

Centres are asked to encourage candidates to consider very carefully the fonts they use in the three tasks. Although presentation is not specifically or explicitly assessed in this unit, it is expected that assignments are reasonably well presented. It is likely, for example, that candidates will use a plain font such as Arial, Times New Roman or Tahoma for much of the work, and excessive use of over-decorative fonts should be avoided, as these are usually not appropriate for large bodies of text.

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Centres are asked to remind candidates that they do not usually need to include extensive sets of screen shots demonstrating practical skills such as inserting pictures into documents or creating documents using wizards.

A number of candidates added annotations to their work in red. Centres are reminded that all additions of this type should be written in blue or black ink, as the use of red ink is not permitted.

A number of candidates attached their research notes, which were sometimes extensive, to their portfolios. There is no need for this – as well as increasing the postage cost burden on centres, it makes it difficult for examiners to identify which is the candidates' own work for assessment and which is simply preparatory material.

Task One: Report

This task was worth 30% of the total marks, and required candidates to produce a report on the technologies available to access and exchange information, and carry out transactions in *Working Styles and New Employment Opportunities*.

The emphasis of this report was required to be on that specific area, and examiners were looking for evidence that candidates had studied this area of society in depth and were able to relate their answers to it. Unfortunately, a large number of candidates produced generic reports that did not focus sufficiently on the identified area, and so were unable to achieve more than the minimum number of marks.

It is expected that candidates will have been taught about all the areas of society identified in the specification. The assessment focuses on one of the areas, and candidates are required to carry out additional detailed research into that particular area, and use their research to produce a detailed report. Many of the assignments produced by candidates, however, did not show evidence of that detailed research, and it appeared that many candidates relied instead on insufficient general knowledge to produce their report.

Centres are asked to point out strongly to candidates the need for detailed research, and to remind them that even a 'basic description', as required in the first mark range, needs to demonstrate some evidence of knowledge of the subject.

The main reason for some candidates' poor performance in this task was the lack of focused research into *Working Styles and New Employment Opportunities*. Candidates might be expected to look, for example, at concepts such as tele-working, call centres, introduction of new digital technology and a range of other ideas, but it is not acceptable to identify that new technology has created larger amounts of leisure time and then write about various aspects of the use of ICT in leisure.

A number of candidates produced lists of new technologies and then discussed changes in working styles, but did not relate those changes back to the technology, and so missed the point of much of the report. Those candidates producing lists such as this often demonstrated little or only simplistic knowledge of the technologies or their use.

In attempting to identify advantages of the technologies, candidates often simply described their use, suggesting that the very existence of the technology was an advantage, rather than giving specific examples. Examiners were surprised to note that very few candidates were able to identify significant disadvantages to the use of technology, with very little mention being made of effects on the environment, job losses and other effects.

Many candidates lost marks through the lack of details of their sources. Although more candidates than in the summer included lists of sources, these were often trivial or too general, including items such as 'the school text book' or 'the Internet'. Candidates should be reminded that specific references should be included, certainly containing title and author as a bare minimum. Evaluations and validations were generally poor, with some candidates offering responses such as 'I checked it to see if it was right' as a validation, which is insufficient.

Task Two: Presentation

This task was worth 52% of the total marks for the examination, and required candidates to focus on *Personal Communications*. Again, a significant number of candidates lost marks through not concentrating their efforts on the prescribed area, but producing generic presentations, which by their nature lacked sufficient depth to achieve more than minimal marks. In a few cases, again often centre-related, candidates produced a report on a different focus area, not mentioning *Personal Communications* at all.

A large proportion of candidates did not describe, or in many cases even identify, the groups and/or individuals affected, thereby losing even the low-level marks.

Many candidates, although including 'Personal Communications' as a title, did not refer much, or in some cases any, of their evidence to that topic. There were many examples of candidates identifying an appropriate group, such as those who have a disability, and then discussing generally the effects of ICT on their lives, but not specifically in terms of communications. This again limited the number of marks that could be awarded.

Many candidates simply produced lists of what technologies were able to do, rather than identifying specific consequences or benefits of the technology.

The majority of candidates produced a technically competent presentation, with evidence of the inclusion of animations, transitions, etc. There were some fine examples of presentations that were of good quality visually, although the pleasing aesthetics were in some cases a mask for lack of detailed knowledge of the topic. Centres are reminded that there are only a very small number of marks available for technical skill in the use of ICT, as this is assessed in Unit One.

Virtually no candidates offered informed suggestions as to how ICT developments will affect the chosen groups in the future, although a small number did suggest some 'fantasy' scenarios but were unable to support their theories.

Again, lack of proper evaluations and details of sources cost many candidates marks. Very few candidates indeed wrote acceptable evaluations of their work, or attempted to validate their sources of information, and so were unable to achieve the top range of marks. Many candidates described, often using many screen-shots, how the presentation had been produced. This is not a requirement, and is not acceptable as evaluation. There was often little evidence that candidates had used ICT to search for and organise their information.

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Task Three: Newsletter or Brochure

This task is worth up to 18% of the total marks for the unit. For most candidates, it was the strongest of the three tasks.

Most candidates produced visually pleasing documents, with newsletters being the more popular option of candidates. These publications were often heavily reliant on the use of software 'wizards' or templates, and the structure of these templates in a number of cases restricted the amount of information that could be included on the document, thereby reducing candidates' opportunities to achieve marks. Whilst the use of such templates is acceptable for this task, candidates should ensure that those chosen are appropriate for the purpose to which they are being put.

The prime requirement of this task was for candidates to describe the purposes of the various pieces of legislation, and to consider the implications for users. Many candidates lost marks by including lengthy technical details of the various laws. This detail was not necessary, and had often been copied verbatim from a website or other source. Candidates handing in such plagiarism received no marks for this task, as the work was clearly not their own. Centres are asked to reinforce to their candidates that producing work in this way is unacceptable, and in itself goes against some of the legislation about which they are likely to be writing.

Very few candidates, again, included details of the sources of their information, and there was very little evidence of appropriate validation of sources.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Unit	Maximum Mark (Raw)	Maximum Mark (Scaled)	Mean Mark (Scaled)	Standard Deviation (Scaled)
Unit 3 – ICT and Society : 3850/3	100	100	21.8	11.6

For units which contain only one component, scaled marks are the same as raw marks.

Unit 3 (3739 candidates)

	Max. mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Scaled Boundary Mark	100	93	80	67	54	43	32	21	10
Uniform Boundary Mark	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20

Definitions

Boundary Mark: the minimum (scaled) mark required by a candidate to qualify for a given grade.

Mean Mark: is the sum of all candidates' marks divided by the number of candidates. In order to compare mean marks for different components, the mean mark (scaled) should be expressed as a percentage of the maximum mark (scaled).

Standard Deviation: a measure of the spread of candidates' marks. In most components, approximately two-thirds of all candidates lie in a range of plus or minus one standard deviation from the mean, and approximately 95% of all candidate lie in range of plus or minus two standard deviations from the mean. In order to compare the standard deviations for different components, the standard deviation (scaled) should be expressed as a percentage of the maximum mark (scaled).

Uniform Mark: a score on a standard scale which indicates a candidate's performance. The lowest uniform mark for grade A* is always 90% of the maximum uniform mark for the unit, similarly grade A is 80%, grade B is 70%, grade C is 60%, grade D is 50%, grade E is 40%, grade F is 30% and grade G is 20%. A candidate's total scaled mark for each unit is converted to a uniform mark and, when subject grades are awarded in 2004, the uniform marks for the units will be added in order to determine the candidate's overall grade.

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