

Examiners' Report January 2008

GCSE

GCSE Applied ICT (5331/01)

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5331 ICT TOOLS AND APPLICATIONS

Just fewer than 10,000 candidates were entered for the externally assessed examination which forms Unit 1 of this specification. Responses varied considerably and covered all grades.

Centres seem to have experienced fewer difficulties in preparing for the examination with fewer enquiries in the days running up to the examination window - and on days when candidates were due to sit the examination.

Specific enquiries centred on the data files (particularly in connection with use of Microsoft Office 2007) and on instructions for labelling. Both of these issues are dealt with in more detail below.

There is still concern among examiners that the **applied** nature of the examination is not fully understood and many candidates continue to gain much more credit for the spreadsheet and database activities than for the other three activities. There is concern that where candidates appear to have been drilled in spreadsheet and database applications they have much less grasp of the importance of effective business communications. The mark scheme for each examination gives an example answer, and these can be used as examples of layout. The detail in the mark scheme indicates other possible layouts.

Smarts Leisure Park is the scenario for the paper. The weighting of the assessment objectives in the specification should encourage centres to expect candidates to be able to apply knowledge and understanding to business applications. In this paper many candidates failed to gain any marks for the memorandum and did not appreciate the need for consistency within the presentation and within the questionnaire.

There has recently been an improvement in the use of graphics and in importing text from data files. The third activity, the questionnaire, and the fifth activity, the presentation, could have been a platform for candidates to continue this improvement. But, perhaps surprisingly, several candidates used inappropriate graphics though fewer failed to maintain proportions. Generally, both lower and higher ability candidates are more successful if they copy and paste rather than attempting to key in text. However, many candidates copied unnecessary subheadings from the data file.

Examiners continue to report a lack of attention to detail and awareness of target audience and fitness for purpose. There has recently been a general improvement in capitalisation but candidates should read instructions carefully - and look to see if there is already text within a data file - and ensure consistency. Candidates frequently could not be awarded full credit in the spreadsheet activity because of inconsistencies.

Consistency within tasks generally was not of a high standard. This was apparent in the third activity - the questionnaire - and the final presentation activity. In the former case, text was given to candidates in a variety of fonts and sizes and it was expected that they would choose one font and format the text consistently. For the presentation, candidates were expected to produce slides with consistent titles and layout.

There were fewer instances of candidates submitting an "answer" to a "question" they hoped would be asked, although several instances of a letter being produced rather than a memorandum.

Candidates once again appear to have been guided to go as far in each activity as possible before moving on.

Use of software tools

The use of software tools such as a wizard, template and/or a spellchecker is, of course, legitimate but candidates should be advised against an over-reliance on such tools. Candidates using a template to prepare the memorandum for task WP1 nearly always lost the fitness for purpose mark.

Where candidates use the wizard to produce a database data entry form, such as task DB3, they must be encouraged to customise that form to gain full credit.

Candidates appeared to make limited use of the spellchecker in this examination. Many candidates had not apparently checked the message in the memorandum and errors in the titles and text in the presentation were frequent. Several candidates had altered the spelling in the questionnaire - notably in the spelling of YOUR, SmartCard and SmartPhone.

Support Materials

As reported for the June session, the Smarts website was updated in the autumn of 2006. There continues to be an impression that some candidates had not seen the site.

The Activity Booklet and Candidate Pack will not be updated but are still available and continue to provide sample activities and revision check-lists.

Secure Environment

Examiners continue to report fewer instances where there is a suspicion that candidates have not worked in a secure environment, although there were still instances where candidates included within their cover sheet a printout from a different candidate.

What is more worrying are reports from examiners where data files from previous examination sessions have been used. Candidates must **only** have access to files pertinent to the current examination.

The separate user area must be set up for each candidate sitting the examination. This user area must not be accessible to the candidate at any time other than during the examination and up to half an hour after the finish (printing time).

Labelling Tasks and Printing

There were fewer enquiries received just before the examination as to how candidates should be instructed to label documents. However it was reported by some examiners that there were centres where the majority of candidates had not labelled their printouts correctly in advance of printing. Candidates should be reminded that scripts which are not labelled before printing will receive zero credit for the task presented. Experience shows that if candidates are encouraged to label **all** their documents before printing in the classroom environment this is rarely an issue in the examination.

The document *Instructions for Labelling* is available on the Edexcel website and within the Instructions for the Conduct of the Examination (ICE) document. This states that, where a table or result of a query/search is required, by far the most successful method is to copy and paste the table into a word processing document and then add a header or footer.

When candidates give a screen shot, rather than copy/paste, there is a tendency not to show all of the required data.

If candidates have been instructed to give a screen shot they should ensure that they show all that is required. In this paper, some candidates did not show sufficient of their database data entry form to gain full credit.

Examiners report again that there is a suspicion that some centres are providing candidates with paper that has been pre-printed with candidate details. This is not in the spirit of the examination, which aims to ensure that candidates can label printouts produced using a variety of software.

Some candidates do not fully check their printouts match the requirements of the task. For most tasks, the expectation is that the task will be printed on one side of A4. Examiners report that this is often not checked especially in using spreadsheet software.

Practice for the Examination

At least one full timed practice is recommended to help candidates appreciate the pressure of a long computer-based examination such as this.

Submission of Work

After a recent general improvement in the ordering of printouts within the cover sheet examiners report that many more candidates submitted work that was not in order and with the tasks face down. Examiners reported that this was often a centre issue where most of the candidates in the centre had submitted tasks face down rather than face up or had added extra holes to the cover sheet and had sealed the cover sheet. For an examiner to be able to use the cover sheet efficiently tasks should be face up and extra holes should not be added to the cover sheet.

Data Files and Software

Some centres seemed not to be aware that the Instructions for Centres **must** be read when the files have been downloaded. These instructions state what files must be made available to candidates and how they should be formatted. It is not possible to provide data files that can be used directly on the systems of every centre and it is the centre's responsibility to ensure that the files are compatible with their system. A number of formats are provided, in two different folders and centres may need to use files from both folders. Not all are intended to be given to candidates. For example, it is not appropriate to give a .csv file containing data for the spreadsheet to the candidate. The data must be transferred into spreadsheet software and formatted according to the instructions.

Centres, therefore, must test the files to ensure file formats are readable using the software in the centre. This must be done **before** the examination window. Candidates may be unnecessarily disadvantaged if they find during the examination that they cannot adequately manipulate the files.

Centres should also ensure that only the **current** data files are available to candidates. Examiners have reported that some candidates have used the old Smarts Leisure Park logo in this session, which was not included in the data files. In other instances, candidates have used data files from the 2007 series.

The data files should **not** be discussed with candidates prior to the examination. Examiners have reported a concern that some centres have instructed candidates to make unnecessary changes to what has been supplied.

The ICE document states that centres should include with the scripts a note of the software used and printouts of centre-created files. Very few centres comply with the first requirement.

Data files and Instructions for Centres for the June 2008 examination will be published as detailed on the ICE document found on the Edexcel website (www.edexcel.org.uk).

ACTIVITY 1 - USING WORD PROCESSING SOFTWARE

Candidates were required to compose a memorandum, using given information.

Task WP1

Very many candidates seemed to have no clear idea about the composition of a memo and the need to show who it is from and to, with a correct date and subject. Those who made some attempt at this often spelt names incorrectly (Catlin, Donovan, Donovon). A number of candidates did not correctly include labels for the heading information. A few candidates attempted to add the status of Kate, Caitlin or Max - but made errors in the spelling of Smarts or Teenz, so lost the mark they would have been awarded if they had only used the names.

The date was generally in a correct format, within the exam window, but without a label although a number of candidates used lower case "m" for May or used an incorrect year. The format "22nd of May" is not acceptable.

The subject caused many candidates difficulty. This was often given simply as "Meeting", which was not sufficient, or a longer phrase with inconsistent capitalisation, such as "Meeting About premier Bookings". If candidates are conversant with Smarts Leisure Park, they will understand its structure and recognise that Max Smarts, as the owner, might need more information in the subject header to enable him see quickly what the memo is about.

Some candidates composed an excellent message, often using wording given in the examination paper. Others wrote a complete paragraph, introducing ideas of their own. However a large number of candidates did not produce an adequate message to describe the purpose of the memo - to arrange a meeting about the bookings of SmartAparts. Few mentioned the bookings or the apartments.

Candidates were expected to have read the introduction to the activity and to use some information given. However, many candidates did not use what they read correctly.

Only a minority of candidates used a correct order for the heading information. Those who used a wizard/template were often more successful than in previous series (although see note above about the use of templates).

Centres are encouraged to use the example answers within the mark scheme as a guide to expected layout - although, as mentioned above, these are not entirely prescriptive.

Key Areas for Improvement

- be fully aware of all types of business documents, including the use of a memorandum
- use suitable headings in a memo
- use a correct order for headings in a memo
- correctly copy information, especially names, into a document
- compose a suitable message using given information
- proofread and check for fitness for purpose

ACTIVITY 2 - USING SPREADSHEET SOFTWARE

The majority of candidates worked through this activity and most produced printouts for all tasks. Fewer submitted the same task with a different header. A disappointing number of candidates continue to appear not to be able to present a spreadsheet in formula view and fail to gain credit for parts of a task that might have been correctly completed. In this examination series 11 marks were available for successful displaying of the correct formulas. Consistency in using capitals and following instructions from the question paper also caused candidates not to gain full credit. While there has been some improvement in the use of formulae and functions, the incorrect use of SUM is still a problem for some candidates.

Task SP1

The majority of candidates added a title in row one, but some failed to use all capitals. The correct title was **BOOKINGS FOR 2007**, but this often appeared as BOOKING FOR 2007 or 2007 BOOKINGS. A large number of candidates changed the capitalisation of the given title. Most candidates correctly formatted the title to Bold and size 12.

Task SP2

Most candidates were able to successfully produce the required bar or column chart. However a number included extra columns of data such as the rent. A large number of candidates lost marks on this task due to errors which included

- poor titles, with poor capitalisation
- incorrect use of the given axis labels, eg Weeks Booked or additions such as Apartments Rented
- unnecessary legend or data labels

Task SP3

This task was generally answered well with many candidates scoring 9 or 10 marks. The major source of errors was an inability to copy labels from the question paper with several candidates capitalising "person" or missing the "(£)" off the second label. Examiners reported that there were several centres where the labels in row 4 were not emboldened suggesting that the data files had not been correctly set up. This could not be checked since these centres (along with most others) had not provided the examiner of a printout of data files which they had used as requested in the ICE document. Candidates were therefore unable to gain the credit for putting the labels in bold.

Candidates also lost marks for incorrect formulas - usually due to the unnecessary inclusion of the SUM function in the formula or using C5*D5 instead of C5/D5. Quite a number of candidates lost all three of the marks for the formula because of a failure to print formula view. It is pleasing to note that few candidates now type or write in a label to explain what formula they have used.

Task SP4

Most candidates were able to use the correct formula with the appropriate absolute cell reference. However there were some who failed to use cell references for part of the formula or included the inappropriate use of the SUM function. As mentioned above, several candidates at some centres seemed unable to produce the required formula view and lost all the marks for this task.

Task SP5

A large number of candidates were able to complete this task successfully.

A significant majority of candidates used a correct criterion for the IF statement. The major errors were to use $F5>80$ or $G5\geq 80$ rather than $G5>80$.

The majority of candidates produce a working IF statement - often surprising examiners with what does not produce an error message.

Again, examiners noted that there were centres where the large majority of candidates did not produce the required formula view of the spreadsheet.

Task SP6

The task required candidates to switch the printout to portrait view and produce a data view of selected columns. This was achieved well by a large number of the candidates. However, some truncation of the data was left uncorrected. There was also occasional deletion of text, notably the label in cell A1 and occasionally rows 1 to 3 were excluded from the printout. Marks were also lost by candidates who had incorrectly formatted column E to currency. In a few centres the majority of candidates seemed unable to produce a printout showing selected columns and often deleted the columns which were not required. This usually led to incorrect data being displayed.

Key areas for improvement

- correctly copy and enter headings and labels
- be aware of the need for consistency of capitalisation in labels and headings
- align data in given cells
- correctly enter functions and formulas
- print in formula view and data view
- change page orientation
- ensure all necessary columns are printed on one page
- enter given data into correct cells
- create an IF statement including correct criterion and messages
- hide and unhide columns and rows in a spreadsheet
- print selected columns on one page
- remove gridlines and row and column headers

ACTIVITY 3 - USING DESKTOP PUBLISHING/WORD PROCESSING SOFTWARE

The task was to complete a questionnaire which had been provided in the data files adding text from a separate word processed document.

Task DP1

On the whole, the task was generally well completed by candidates with many scoring above 10 out of 16.

Marks were lost mainly due to:

- a significant number of candidates didn't use the text of the original file, often changing YOUR POSTCODE to YOU'RE POSTCODE or deleting the instructions for each question
- data not fully copied from text field FACTS
- the incorrect spelling of, eg "Smart Phone" is worrying as it indicates perhaps that candidates aren't being sufficiently immersed in Smarts and previous papers
- poor spacing after the colon with data items
- unnecessary tick box included with the line for "Other information ..."
- inconsistent alignment - "many candidates were stumped by the layout issue"
- although many candidates added 3 lines, few used double spacing and some lines were so small as to make them unusable
- a surprising number of candidates just added 3 dots, rather than 3 dotted lines
- inconsistent font size
- no attempt at customisation of form by using boxes rather than dotted lines for the information at the top of the form (as suggested in the question paper)
- little checking of the final document with only a tiny minority gaining the final mark for checking that all the required tasks had been completed and that the final document was fit for its purpose.

A handful of candidates filled in the questionnaire rather than including all blocks of information.

Key areas for improvement

- import text by copy and paste, especially retaining punctuation
- use a given template to produce a document
- format text to a suitable size for its purpose
- consider consistency of font and style in headings, sub-headings and body text
- appropriate use of tab
- appropriate use of line spacing
- create a suitable layout for a specific document
- consider white space in a document
- avoid over-reliance on a spellchecker
- ensuring that a document fits on one A4 sheet by using appropriate font size and spacing
- proof-read text
- consider fitness for purpose

ACTIVITY 4 - USING DATABASE SOFTWARE

Examiners report that there was some improvement in responses for the database activity, although customisation of forms still causes difficulty. Few candidates made any attempt at customisation.

There are still a significant number of candidates who do not enter their details before printing and who, therefore, cannot be given credit for these printouts.

The data file provided for the APARTMENT table incorrectly included in the description of the DIST (the distance field) reference to distance from reception rather than distance from the sea. However this did not appear to cause any candidates any difficulty and did not seem to affect the responses from the candidates.

Task DB1

This was designed as a relatively straightforward first database activity. The given table required sorting in ascending order of distance. The candidates were then asked to print and then label the printout. This indicates that the labelling should be handwritten. Many candidates failed to mark the required records in any way and so lost the two marks available.

There is still a significant number of candidates who produce a screen shot of their tables and results. This often means that they do not show all of the required records and some lost the mark in this task for showing all 31 records on one A4 sheet.

Candidates who did not gain full marks for correctly sorting the data generally sorted in descending order rather than ascending order.

Task DB

The majority of candidates gained both marks for data entry in this task, although some still made errors in using the letter O where a zero was required and vice versa. Some candidates lost marks for not using Yes and No and displayed true/false or -1/0 in their printout. Some candidates lost marks because all 8 fields were not visible and credit could not therefore be given. Most candidates were able to sort correctly.

Task DB3

Many candidates can produce a data entry form, but few gain full marks. The most marks were lost where the candidate had used a wizard but had not gained marks for customisation and improving the form design to make it easier to use by including drop down menus for example.

Although some of the candidates gave their data entry form a title, these varied considerably in suitability. Many still include the task name. Although this is not penalised for this mark point, candidates should be reminded that, as an applied qualification, documents should be made to look "professional".

Most candidates gave the correct records and fields but very few had made any attempt to customise the field names, even though these were quite straightforward in this examination. Some candidates had customised data entry boxes but these were often inappropriate. For example Yes/No fields were made inappropriately larger than necessary.

A relatively large number of candidates tend to crop the screenshot too much and lose valuable elements. Candidates should be reminded that a screen shot of a data entry form should contain the whole form and be large enough to be legible to an examiner.

Task DB4

This task was designed as a simple query of one of the tables in the database. A surprising number of candidates failed to score on this task due to incorrect searches or not printing all the required fields.

Task DB5

This search was a more complex query of the database. Many candidates scored well and achieved the correct results. However, there were many who produced all the records in the table. Most however were able to display the correct fields in the correct order.

Key areas for improvement

- correctly add a new record
- show and print all records as required
- sort on a correct field
- search on one criterion
- search on more than one criterion
- produce a database data entry form with a suitable heading
- customise field names in a database data entry form
- show and print only the required fields of a table/search

ACTIVITY 5 - USING WORD PROCESSING/PRESENTATION SOFTWARE

In this activity, candidates were asked to use a given story board to produce a 3 slide presentation. After printing out a copy of the storyboard, candidates were asked to annotate it with required items given in the question paper. Quite a number of candidates failed to provide the necessary annotations.

Task MM1

The storyboard was printed out correctly in the majority of cases. Examiners noted that several candidates did not then follow instructions to label this printout with the necessary items. The mark scheme was felt to be quite generous in what was allowed for the marks. Many candidates did not realise that the story board is an important element in producing a presentation in a commercial environment where the actual production may be done by a different member of staff from the one producing the story board. Labels were often too vague in, for example, not correctly identifying which logos were to be included.

Some candidates attempted to answer this question by using the storyboard and adding the objects to the word processed document rather than creating a new presentation.

Task MM2

Candidates were asked to produce the first slide to match the requirements and the storyboard. Some candidates placed the logos in inappropriate locations within the slide. The SMARTAPARTS 2007 title was often incorrectly spelt with several alternatives being seen. Whilst this reinforces the idea that candidates do not always check their work, spelling was not penalised on this occasion. Correct capitalisation was also an issue in this task with many candidates not using uppercase for the title and not using title case for the subtitle as given in the instructions. Most candidates chose a suitable graphic from the file with only a few choosing a clipart image. However these clipart images were often inappropriate for the presentation.

Task MM3

For the second slide, candidates were asked to have the same logos as on slide 1, and then add a suitable title and a copy of their chart from SP2. The majority of candidates were able to correctly copy the logos from slide 1. However many then ignored the storyboard and placed the title level with the top logo. Spelling and capitalisation were also often incorrectly applied to the title. Most candidates managed to successfully copy and paste the graph but then lost the mark because the graph obscured part of the logo. Some candidates lost the mark for using a screenshot of the graph rather than copy and pasting the graph itself.

Task MM4

For the third slide, candidates were asked to have the same logos as on slides 1 and 2, and then add a suitable title and a copy of query results. The majority of candidates were able to correctly copy the logos from slide 1 or slide 2. However many then ignored the storyboard and again placed the title level with the top logo. Spelling and capitalisation were also often incorrectly applied to the title. Many candidates did not copy and paste the query results and lost the mark for using a screenshot of the table rather than copy and pasting the table itself.

Task MM5

Many candidates did not check that the storyboard was matched by their presentation and did not check fitness for purpose and so lost marks. This task was not well achieved by most of the candidates and few marks were gained. Again candidates were apparently unwilling to check the accuracy of their work before or after printing and submit work which is not consistent with an applied ICT qualification. Several candidates did not print out the slides 2 to a page.

Key areas for improvement

- use a storyboard as given
- annotate a document
- copy and paste graphics from one document to another
- copy text from the question paper
- use correct capitalisation of text
- copy and paste graphs/charts from a spreadsheet application
- copy and paste tables/query results from a database application
- check for consistency in text entry and layout
- print slide presentations in different ways eg 2 to a page
- check fitness for purpose for business documents

Grade Boundaries

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5331	Max Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Raw	90	93	85	77	69	59	49	40	31
UMS	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20

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