Examiners' Report January 2009

GCSE Applied ICT (2331)

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5331: Unit 1 - ICT Tools & Applications

General Comments
The main issues to note are that some candidates are not able to gain a large number of marks because of the lack of attention to detail.

For example
- 14 marks on this paper were available to candidates able to accurately copy text from the examination paper to the appropriate document. Many candidates did not achieve marks because they did not check the spelling, the use of capitals and/or the correct punctuation.
- 10 marks on the paper this series were for correct formulae in the spreadsheet tasks. Although the evidence presented in the printouts suggested that they had obtained the correct values. Many candidates did not gain these marks because they did not display the formulae in their printouts.
- Several candidates lost marks where screenshot evidence was produced. This in itself was generally not penalised but several of the screenshots were cropped so that vital information was not present or the image was too small to read clearly. In database tables and queries, copying and pasting the data into a word document is a more effective way of submitting the response.
- The loss of marks due to candidates forgetting to type their details on documents (particularly in the database tasks) before printing is continuing to become less of an issue than it has been in earlier series of this examination.

Candidates at many centres seem not to have been given sufficient instructions in the correct collation of the printouts. Some candidates had pages upside down, back to front or effectively sealed into the folded cover sheet by knotted treasury tags through both the front and the back of the cover sheet. The cover sheet gives clear guidance about the appropriate way of submitting the tasks. Centres should ensure that candidates are given clear instructions by staff during the examination.

There is continuing evidence that the applied nature of the qualification is not fully understood by the candidates and therefore many are unable to gain fitness for purpose marks. Generally database and spreadsheet tasks, which tend to be more mechanical, gain higher marks than the tasks which require effective business communication such as word processed documents and database forms. Examiners also report that candidates often do not seem able to reproduce standard layouts for business documents such as letters and memos. There have been several examples of appropriate layouts in the mark schemes from previous.

Some centres reported difficulties with the datafiles to Edexcel. In addition some examiners have noted that there is sometimes evidence that candidates have had access to data files and graphics which were not provided as part of this examination series. Centres are reminded that where the data files need to be recreated then a copy of the files actually used by the students should be submitted as well so that the examiners can take note of any centre issues.

Software

The use of Microsoft products continues to dominate the work seen by examiners. Centres are reminded to follow the instruction to include within the envelope of scripts details of the software used during the examination. For this session, centres were provided with three sets of the data files – in Microsoft Office 97, Microsoft Office 2003 and in non-Office formats (usually txt, csv and rtf format). Centres will often have to collate the set of data files from all these versions. For example, conversion of the database files to the appropriate version of Access. This will be a growing issue as more centres move towards updating their software to Office 2007.

The use of software tools such as wizards, templates and the use of spelling and grammar checkers is, of course, legitimate and encouraged but candidates often place too great a reliance on the output of such tools and do not always pay attention to proof reading. Candidates need to be aware that in a business environment, names do not always appear in the dictionary and that software guidance about misspellings may be inaccurate. By default, Word for example does not check words in uppercase. Examples of errors spotted included "Tramp lining" to replace "Trampolining" and "ANNIVERSERY" rather than "ANNIVERSARY".

Some candidates may need additional support in grasping the customisation of the output of templates and wizards. For example, the field names used in a database form are often not suitable for labels, this leaves these documents inadequately presented in many cases.

Support Materials

The Smarts Leisure Park continues to be the basis of the work in this examination. The Smarts website (www.smartsleisure.co.uk) is regularly updated and often provides useful information about the background to the organisation.

In addition, the Activity Booklet and Candidate Kit are still available and provide useful guidance for candidates about the examination and include activities and revision check lists.

Secure Environment

Examiners continue to report a few cases where there is a suspicion that candidates have not worked in a secure environment. A few cases have been reported where the cover sheet for one candidate included work from other candidates.

One or two examiners reported that some candidates appeared to have access to data files from previous examination series. Centres are reminded that the candidates should only have access to the software and the current data files, that a separate user area must be set up for use solely during the examination and that candidates should not have access to this area except during when they are sitting the examination.

Labelling and Printing

Overall, this aspect of the examination was tackled successfully during this series. However, it still remains the case that there are some centres where some candidates had not gained marks because they had not included typed candidate details on tasks. Candidates perhaps need to be reminded that tasks which are not correctly labelled before printing will gain no marks. Handwritten details are not accepted in this qualification. Experience has shown that if candidates are encouraged to label all their documents before printing in the normal classroom environment then this is rarely an issue in the examination.

The instructions are available on the Edexcel website and within the Instructions for Conduct of the Examination (ICE) document.

Occasionally examiners have raised concerns that some centres have provided candidates with paper that is 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 applications.

Practice for the Examination

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

Submission of Work

Some examiners reported that some centres had not submitted the candidates' work in the attendance register order and that occasionally a correctly completed attendance registers were not included with the scripts.

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 three different folders and Centres may need to use files from more than one folder. 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, need to ensure that they test the files to ensure file formats are readable using the software in the centre. This must be done in the weeks **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. The data files should **not** be discussed with candidates at any time before the end of the examination window.

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 this requirement.

Data files and Instructions for Centres for the June 2009 series will be available for registered centres to download from the Edexcel website in April 2009.

ACTIVITY 1 – Using Word Processing Software

Task WP1

Candidates were asked to create a letter from a letterhead template file and a text document containing the contents of the letter. They were asked to put in appropriate places the date, recipients address details, greeting line, complimentary closure and name and details of the sender.

Some candidates had amended the letterhead in some way. When inserting the date, some candidates had not checked their printout and left a date similar to 12 January 2009-01-12. The data entry of the name and address caused some students to lose marks. Spellings of Southampton often included "hh" or omitted the "p". The postcode also often mistakenly has S0 rather than SO. Quite a number of candidates place the recipients details on the right rather than the left.

The greeting often given was incorrect with Dear Mr Alex Harraway being seen quite frequently. Several candidates omitted the greeting completely. The transfer of text from the text file was often completed correctly though some omitted the subject of the letter. "Yours sincerely" was often mistakenly inserted as "Yours Sincerely". Many candidates made errors in the senders details with "Manger" rather than "Manager" seen frequently.

Very few candidates gained the final mark which requires the ability to complete the task correctly and check for fitness for purpose. Many of the letters produced by candidates could not be sent out by a professional organisation.

Task WP1

Candidates were asked to create a memo from the Manager of Kidz Club to the Owner of Smarts Leisure to let him know that Alex, a former work experience student had been invited to attend an anniversary party.

Most candidates gained the marks for the recipient and sender information. A majority put the correct date on the memo but did not gain marks because they did not include a label. Some candidates did not use suitable titles. Candidates should be advised by Centres that the question paper usually provides a hint as to what the title might need to include. The message in the body of the memo often suggested that it was Max Smarts who was being invited to attend the party. The inclusion of the word "of" in a date is common. (E.g. 2nd of May). Many candidates seem not to understand the difference between the layout of a letter and a memo with several examples of Dear Max and Yours sincerely.

Key areas for improvement – Activity 1

- use a letterhead as given
- produce a business letter with correct components and suitable layout
- enter a correct date in a correct format in a correct position
- correctly enter recipient's details in a suitable position in a business letter
- add a suitable salutation
- use text as given
- add a complimentary close that is consistent with a salutation
- copy details of a sender and his/her position within an organisation
- format a document to consistent font, style and size
- proof-read a document
- check a document for fitness for purpose **before** printing

ACTIVITY 2 – Using Spreadsheet Software

Task SP1

Candidates were asked to enter a given title into cell A1 and format the title according to instructions.

Most candidates gained full marks for this task. Those that did not gain maximum marks did not spell the title correctly, or had incorrect use of capitals and incorrect formatting.

Task SP2

Candidates were asked to produce a pie chart of a set of data, include a suitable title, and include a legend and percentage labels.

Most candidates produced the correct graph, though there were some who used the incorrect column of data. Titles were not correctly entered with inconsistent capitalisation, inaccurate spelling and unsuitable text. A large number of candidates did not change the default colours for the segments so that printing on black and white printers left two or more of the segments indistinguishable. Candidates need to be reminded that where a black and white printout is produced then they should check that the document is fit for purpose.

Task SP3

Candidates were asked to insert two new rows and enter given data into these cells.

Most candidates gained full marks for this task. However some inserted the rows in the wrong place and some lost marks for misspelling of Khalid or Mahina.

Task SP4

Candidates were asked to insert two given labels, a simple arithmetic formula, enter a formula including a function and copy the formulae into appropriate cells.

Many candidates did not gain marks due to inaccuracies in copying the text from the question paper - usually incorrect capitalisation of "unsold". Several candidates did not gain marks for this task due to failure to print a formulae view of the spreadsheet. Others did not gain marks for inappropriate use of the SUM function in simple arithmetic formulae. Another cause for not gaining marks was the inclusion of incorrect (empty) cells in a SUM function usually caused by relying too much on the "autosum" tool.

Task SP5

Candidates were asked to enter a value and labels into given cells, then to enter a formula using an absolute cell reference which was then copied to other cells. They were also asked to format a column of data to currency though this was marked in SP6.

Many candidates again did not to copy labels accurately from the question paper. The use of an absolute cell reference was well answered by a large number of candidates. Some failed to use the absolute cell reference and therefore did not gain the mark for copying the absolute formula.

Task SP6

Candidates were asked to goal seek to find out the cost of tickets needed to make a particular value for the total.

Many managed to get the correct value and gained full marks for this task.

Key areas for improvement – Activity 2

- correctly copy and enter headings and labels
- format labels consistently using capitalisation, bold and font size appropriately
- be aware of the need for consistency of capitalisation in labels and headings
- correctly enter functions and formulae
- create efficient formulae using SUM appropriately
- print in formula view and data view
- change page orientation
- insert rows
- enter given data into correct cells
- change row heights and column widths to display labels and data effectively
- print selected cell ranges on one page
- show and/or hide gridlines and row and column headers
- produce graphs with appropriate labels
- change the default settings for patterns and shading in graphs

ACTIVITY 3 – Using Presentation Software

Task MM1

Candidates were asked to create a second slide for a simple presentation. They were given the text in a word document and were asked to copy and paste the text into the slide show, add a title and some graphics.

Some candidates did not gain marks because of the change in the text from trampolining to tramp lining.

Task MM2

Candidates were asked to create a third slide. Again they were given the text and asked to add graphics.

Some candidates did not gain marks for lack of care in sizing the graphics and logos.

Task MM3

Candidates were asked to print the slide show two to a page and check that their slides matched the given story board.

Some candidates did not gain marks due to not complying with the story board – including, bullet points for the text items, incorrect alignment of text and inappropriate text size for a presentation.

Key areas for improvement – Activity 3

- use a storyboard as given
- copy and paste graphics from one document to another
- copy text from the question paper
- use correct capitalisation of text
- 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

ACTIVITY 4 – Using Database Software

There continues to be an improvement in the candidates' responses to database tasks although customisation still causes difficulty and few candidates gain marks for this. There is a decreasing number of candidates who do not gain marks due to no including candidate details before printing. The number who add their details into a record or as separate fields also seems to be decreasing. The use of "copy and paste" into a word processed document is an increasingly popular way of presenting the information from tables and queries.

Task DB1

Candidates were asked to insert a new record and sort the records in ascending order of date of birth.
Most candidates gained full marks for this task. Those that did not gain full marks did not show all fields or misspelt the details.

Task DB2

Candidates were asked to carry out a simple search and produce a table showing all fields.

Most candidates gained both marks but some cropped the table and so did not gain the mark for showing all fields.

Task DB3

Candidates were asked to do a search using two criteria and display selected fields in a given order.

Most of the candidates gained marks in this task though sometimes it was not clear to the examiners how some of the candidates had obtained the incorrect records shown.

Task DB4

Candidates were asked to create a new table from given instructions. They were asked to display the table in design view showing appropriate primary key and validation rules.

Many candidates scored well on this task often only not gaining the mark due to incorrect copying of the field names. It was noted that the exam paper did contain the field names StaffFname and StaffLName. Elsewhere in the paper the same fields were given as StaffFName and StaffLName. Candidates were therefore credited for use of either StaffFname or StaffFName.

Task DB5

Candidates were asked to produce a customised data entry form for the table they produced for DB4.

Most candidates used the wizard and gained a mark for the correct fields but did not customise the form or make it easier to use. Expected answers were that candidates would customise the field names in the labels changing StaffFName to Staff First Name and ActCode to Activity Code. Making the form easier to use would include the use of drop down menus for the ActCode replacing the one letter code with for example the full name of the activity.

Task DB6

Candidates were asked to enter three records into the table.

Most candidates were able to copy the data correctly. Where candidates did not gain marks, it was usually due to not using the capitals as given.

Task DB7

Candidates were asked to produce a screen shot of a query design which included related tables and secondary sorting of data.

Many candidates were able to produce a screen shot but did not gain marks due to inappropriate cropping of the image. This meant that it was not clear whether the candidate had carried out the task correctly. Few candidates managed to gain both marks for showing the correct sorting of the data.

Key areas for improvement – Activity 4

- sorting tables of data to alphabetic and reverse alphabetic order.
- correctly add a new record using data as given
- show and print all records as required
- search on one criterion using the correct combination of comparison operators (>, = and <)
- search on multiple criteria
- search on related tables
- produce a database table design using validation rules and primary keys
- customise field names in a data entry form
- show and print only the required fields of a table/search
- show screen shots of query design and forms without truncating information
- carry out secondary searches

ACTIVITY 5 – Using Desktop Publishing / Word Processing Software

Candidates were asked to produce a report in a given format including text imported from a text file. They were then asked to insert the graph from SP2 and the database search from DB2 in appropriate locations within the text.

Candidates often did not gain the mark for entering the given text due to spelling errors or failure to use capitals as given. The text was generally copied and pasted correctly from the data file. There was little evidence of candidates retyping the text.

Candidates were generally able to insert the spreadsheet and database work but some did not locate them appropriately. Insertion of screen shots of the items was not rewarded. Few candidates gained marks for suitable layout and checking that the document was fit for purpose.

Key areas for improvement – Activity 5

- Copying text accurately.
- Formatting text to given requirements
- Use of italics and bold enhancements to text
- Left, right, centre and fully justified alignment of text
- Insertion of spreadsheet graphs in a text document.
- Insertion of database extracts in a text document.
- Appropriate placing of text and graphics
- Checking for consistency of layout and fonts
- Checking for fitness for purpose

Grade Boundaries

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Grade	Max. Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Raw boundary mark	100	93	87	81	75	67	59	51	43
Uniform boundary mark	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20