

Examiners' Report

January 2010

GCSE

GCSE Applied ICT (5331)

Unit 1 - ICT Tools & Applications

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General Comments

During this session just over 2000 candidates were entered for the examination which forms Unit 1 of this specification. Responses varied considerably and covered all grades. The examination is now in its 13th series. Many of the issues which have been highlighted in previous series still remain. Some of the issues which were mentioned in previous series are now much less commonly experienced.

The main issues to note are that candidates lose a large number of marks because of the failure to pay attention to detail and consider fitness for purpose.

For example

- 18 marks on this paper were available to candidates able to accurately copy text and/or images from the examination paper or from the data files to the appropriate document. Many candidates lost marks because they failed to check the spelling, the use of capitals and/or the correct punctuation or because they placed images too close to the edge of the paper.
- 18 marks on the paper this series were for correct formulae in the spreadsheet tasks. Many candidates lost these marks because they failed to display the formulae in their printouts - though the evidence presented in the printouts suggested that they had obtained the correct values.
- 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 failure to type the candidate details on documents (particularly in the database tasks) before printing is less of an issue now than it has been in earlier series of this examination.

Candidates at many centres seem to be poorly instructed in the correct collation of the printouts. Sometimes all the candidates at a centre 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. This behaviour common to most candidates at a centre suggests that they have been badly instructed by the invigilators. The instructions for collating are clearly presented on page 2 of the cover sheet. It is also the case that some centres fail to sort the scripts in attendance register order.

There is continuing evidence that the applied nature of the qualification is not fully understood by the candidates and many fail to gain fitness for purpose marks. Candidates are expected to follow instructions in the examination paper as if it were a manager giving instruction. Candidates should check their printouts to ensure that they are fit for purpose. This sometimes means modifying column headings or field labels to make the document easier to understand or more fit for purpose. There is some evidence that candidates have not checked that they have followed all the instructions in the examination paper. The bullet point symbol in the paper was deliberately chosen at the outset of this qualification so that candidates could, if they wished, tick off completion of each instruction.

Generally database and spreadsheet tasks, which tend to be more mechanical, generally gain higher marks than the tasks which require effective business communication such as word processed documents and database reports. However,

candidates rarely customise the output from wizards so that database reports are seldom suitable or professionally laid out. Examiners also report that candidates often do not seem able to reproduce standard layouts for business documents such as letters and agendas.

There were fewer difficulties reported to the Board of problems associated with the data files.

Software

The use of Microsoft products continues to dominate the work seen by examiners. Even so, centres rarely follow the instruction to include within the envelope of scripts details of the software used during the examination. Centres need to check that the data files used by the candidates are appropriately checked for use by the candidates. For example, conversion of the database files to the appropriate version of Access.

The use of software tools such as wizards, templates and the use of spelling and grammar checkers is, of course, legitimate but candidates often place too great a reliance on the output of such tools and do not always pay attention to proof reading. Customisation of the output of templates and wizards is rarely done effectively by candidates. This leaves documents poorly 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) continues to be a basis for background information about the leisure park and 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 small number of 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, for example logos which were changed up to three years ago. 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 when they are sitting the examination. It is also worth noting that candidates should not have any access to internet technology during the examination.

Labelling and Printing

There were fewer enquiries about this aspect of the examination during this series. However, it still remains the case that there are some centres a large number of candidates at the centre had failed to gain marks for some tasks because they had not included typed candidate details on their documents. Candidates perhaps need to be reminded that tasks which are not correctly labelled before printing will gain zero 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. In addition, the paper includes the instruction **“You MUST enter your name, candidate number, centre number and task name BEFORE PRINTING”** within each task.

Occasionally examiners continue to raise 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.

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 responsibility of staff at the centre to ensure that the files are compatible with the computer systems being used for the examination. A number of formats are provided, in three different folders and centres may need to use files from each of these 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. In some cases (where the centre is not using Microsoft 2003 or Microsoft 97 products), the data must be transferred into the centre’s software applications and formatted according to the instructions within the Notes for Centres.

Centres, therefore, need to test the files to ensure that the files are readable using the software to be used by the candidates 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 prior to the examination.

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 2010 series will be available for registered centres to download from the Edexcel website in April 2010.

ACTIVITY 1 - USING WORD PROCESSING SOFTWARE

Candidates were required to produce an agenda. They were provided with a text file containing a list of non-standard items for the agenda. They also needed to copy the logo from a word processed document. The candidates were expected to add details of the time and place of the meeting and include the standard agenda items (Apologies, Minutes, Matters Arising, Any Other Business and Date of Next Meeting).

Many candidates had used the given text file and added the appropriate logo. Many candidates failed to provide a suitable title for the meeting, failed to follow the instruction to include the title AGENDA in capitals and did not include the details or the standard items from the agenda. Those that did attempt to include the standard items often had spelling errors in their list. Examiners noted "Apologise for last meeting", "Minutes of next meeting" and "Minuets"

Key areas for improvement

- sensible use of spelling and grammar checkers
- apply correct layout for an agenda
- include an appropriate title for an agenda
- add details of a meeting time and place in an appropriate place in an agenda
- knowledge of standard agenda items
- place agenda items in a correct order
- produce a consistent numbered list
- checking fitness for purpose

ACTIVITY 2 - USING SPREADSHEET SOFTWARE

Many candidates who completed this task generally gained high marks. Candidates were provided with a spreadsheet and were asked to add titles and formulae to complete the spreadsheet.

Task SP1

Candidates were asked to insert a heading into cell A1 and format it in a given way. Most candidates gained the marks for entering the title in the correct location and for the formatting of the label. However a large number of candidates failed to copy the title accurately. They were then required format a column to show currency to 2 decimal places. Most candidates demonstrated the required skill in formatting the column.

Task SP2

In this task candidates had to insert a label, produce formulas and display the spreadsheet in formula view without truncating data or formulas. Many candidates would have gained the marks for the formulae but failed to receive them because they had not displayed the spreadsheet in formula view. That they were capable of displaying formulae was often demonstrated by their responses to later tasks. Many candidates lose marks because of the inappropriate use of the SUM function. In this examination, candidates are expected to use efficient formulae. In this task, candidates lost marks where they had used =SUM(C4*D4) rather than the more efficient =C4*D4. Many of these candidates then lost marks for the total of the column by using the format =E4+E5+E6 etc.

Some candidates lost marks because in using the AutoSum function they had not excluded the empty cells in E15. Examiners reported that some candidates lost marks

due to inaccuracies in copying the label "Gross Pay". These candidates had usually used lower case or added extra text.

Task SP3

Candidates were asked to use the IF function in this task. The use of this function is increasingly well completed by candidates. Most candidates who showed formulae gained high marks in this task. Candidates generally used absolute cell references appropriately. Candidates often lost marks because they included quotation marks around the zero in the formula.

Task SP4

This task required candidates to enter a second IF function. This was again generally well completed by the candidates. However many lost marks for inappropriate quotation marks in the formula. Most candidates were able to produce a calculation which correctly produced 8% of the Gross Pay.

Task SP5

Candidates were required to enter a label, calculate Net Pay using a simple formula and replicate formulae across a row and down a column. Many candidates again used SUM inappropriately and/or did not replicate formulae correctly.

Task SP6

Candidates were asked to display the spreadsheet in data view, format appropriate columns to currency with two decimal places and print selected areas of the spreadsheet. Most candidates managed to print the selected areas but many candidates failed to ensure that the data was formatted to 2 decimal places and display the £ symbol. Often gridlines and row and column headers were not removed.

Key areas for improvement

- 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
- use absolute and relative cell references appropriately
- create efficient formulae (especially the appropriate use of the SUM function)
- print in formula view and data view
- change page orientation from landscape to portrait or portrait to landscape
- ensure all necessary columns are printed on one page
- enter given data into correct cells
- change row heights and column widths to display labels and data effectively
- create an IF function including correct criterion and messages
- print selected cell ranges on one page
- show and/or hide gridlines and row and column headers

ACTIVITY 3 - USING DESKTOP PUBLISHING / WORD PROCESSING SOFTWARE

Candidates were provided with a draft questionnaire and were asked to complete it with text from a separate document. They were also required to add formatting to the document to enhance the appearance.

This task generally gained candidates high marks. However there was a lack of attention to detail causing many candidates to lose marks. There were few examples of candidates re-typing the text from the second document.

Most candidates were able to combine the two documents but failed to follow the formatting of the original document so the tick boxes were often poorly aligned. The dotted lines for the "Other" response in Question 3 were often not consistent with those provided in Question 1. Candidates also often failed to include 3 consistent lines of dots for additional comments. Those candidates who did include the lines of dots often failed to double line space them.

Candidates were asked to include items to make the document easier to use. The suggestion on the paper was that this might include boxes for the dates in the top section of the questionnaire. Many candidates failed to include any items to gain this mark. Those that did often failed to make their boxes consistent for both date responses.

Key areas for improvement

- correctly copy information into a document
- apply correct layout using tabs
- use consistent fonts and layouts
- proofread and check for fitness for purpose

ACTIVITY 4 - USING DATABASE SOFTWARE

There continues to be an improvement in the candidates' responses to database tasks although customisation still causes some difficulty and few candidates gain maximum marks for this. The number of candidates who lose marks due to failure to include candidate details before printing is decreasing. The number of candidates who add their details into a record or as separate fields also seems to be falling. The use of "copy and paste" into a word processed document is an increasingly popular way of presenting tables and queries.

Task DB1

This was designed to be a relatively straightforward database task of entering a new record then sorting the table. The candidates were then required to print out the table. Most candidates gained all the marks on this task. However there were a number of candidates who failed to copy the given data accurately into the new record. This was most notable in candidates who used the wrong date for the new record. Examiners therefore noted responders to the questionnaire who were only two weeks old. Sometimes the first and last names were transposed. Occasionally marks were lost where candidates had not used the correct capitalisation of the text in the data entry. A few candidates lost marks for not checking that there was no truncation of the data.

Task DB2

Candidates were required to carry out a simple search and sort the records in order of date of birth. Many candidates achieved full marks for this task. Some candidates however lost marks unnecessarily by not including all fields in their results.

Task DB3

Candidates were asked to create a database report of the results of the query they had done for task DB2. Many candidates lost marks for not having a suitable title for the report often failing to spell correctly. This was especially noticeable in the spelling of "eligible" and "receive" when these were included in the title. An increasing number of candidates did attempt successfully to customise the field column headings.

Task DB4

In task DB4 candidates were asked to do a simple search on related tables. They were asked to show only some of the fields in the given order. Many candidates gained full marks for this task. Those that dropped marks tended to use SchoolID rather than SchoolName in their fields.

Task DB5

Candidates were asked to produce a database report of the results of the search carried out for DB4. Many candidates seem unable to take the information given in the stem of the question and produce a suitable title for the report. Often candidates would produce a suitable title only to lose the mark for inappropriate capitalisation. Candidates rarely gained the marks for customisation of all the field names in the column headers. The candidates were required to sort the records on LastName but produce the report in the order FirstName, LastName, DoB and SchoolName. Many candidates sorted correctly but failed to note the necessary rearrangement of fields for the report.

Task DB6

Candidates were asked to carry out a complex search on the related tables. Most candidates were able to produce the correct records and fields. However few candidates were able to provide the evidence for secondary sorting.

Key areas for improvement

- correctly add new records using data as given
- sorting tables of data in ascending and descending order
- show and print records and/or fields as required
- search on one criterion using the correct combination of comparison operators (>, = and <)
- search on two criteria using appropriate operators
- search on related tables
- sorting data using primary and secondary sort fields
- show and print only the required fields of a table/search/report
- customise field names in a database report
- print in landscape and/or portrait

ACTIVITY 5 - USING WORD PROCESSING SOFTWARE (MAIL MERGE)

Candidates were given a draft letter and were asked to produce a mail merge document from the draft and a database table.

Most candidates used the draft letter as given. However a significant number removed the final line of the text of the letter. (Enc). Some also removed the footer contact details of Smarts Leisure Park. Several candidates failed to include the date as required. Many candidates also failed to correctly align the recipient's address. Marks were also lost by candidates not concluding the letter with the appropriate complimentary closure and name and title of the sender of the letter. Several candidates included their own name and gave themselves a title in the hierarchy of Smarts Leisure Park.

Many candidates were able to evidence the use of merge fields but failed to gain marks for completion of the address and greeting line. There were many instances of inappropriate use of first name and/or initials in the greeting. Many candidates also failed to include appropriate spacing in between the merge fields for post code and names.

Most candidates produced the one required completed letter. Some candidates however lost marks because their "completed" letter was not a mail merge using their master document.

Key areas for improvement

- use of drafts as given
- inserting the correct date in an appropriate format
- correct alignment of address details
- knowledge of the format of address and greeting
- knowledge of conventions for complimentary close for business letters
- application of conventions for layout for business letters
- use of spacing in inserting merge fields
- proof reading and checking for fitness for purpose

Grade Boundaries

5331/01

Grade	Max. Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Raw boundary mark	100	97	89	81	73	64	55	46	37
Uniform boundary mark	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20

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