Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2010

Applied GCSE
Information and Communication Technology (5331)

Unit 1 – ICT Tools and Applications

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General Comments

The examination is now in its fourteenth series. Candidate responses varied considerably and covered all grades. Many of the issues which have been highlighted in previous series still remain although 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 not paying enough attention to detail. For example:

- 22 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 or overlapping text. Examiners noted that even candidates who were scoring high marks overall were still making errors in entering text copied from the question paper. Candidates are advised to check carefully (character by character) that they have copied information accurately.

- 14 marks on this paper were for correct formulae and replication 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 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.

A large amount of candidates had collated their printouts incorrectly. 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 not been correctly 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 the instructions. 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 square 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.

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.

Exam Preparation

Software

The use of Microsoft products continues to dominate the work seen by examiners. Centres rarely followed 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 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.

Some 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 whilst 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, there were some centres where a large number of candidates had failed to gain marks for some tasks because they had not included typed candidate details on their documents. Candidates should 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.

Some 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.

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, 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 available to the candidates in the centre. This must be done in the weeks **before** the examination window. Candidates may be unnecessarily disadvantaged if they find that during the examination, 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 their 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.

Activity 1 – Using Word Processing Software

Candidates were required to produce a letter from a letterhead template and a separate text file. They were instructed to include the standard features of a letter. Previous examination papers and mark schemes have indicated the expected layout. Several candidates failed to use the letterhead template or modified this by deleting the address details. Candidates are not penalised for inadvertent changes due to adding their candidate details but the expectation is that the template should be still recognisable. Many candidates failed to gain marks for correctly entering the recipient's address (given in the question paper). These candidates tended to miss out important parts of the address such as the town or the school name. Many candidates failed to spell correctly the headteacher's name or the name of the school. Misspelling of Drogheda was also common. The date was often incorrectly inserted in the header or hanging in the middle of the page. Greeting lines often incorrectly included Mr O'Brien's initial. Several candidates failed to fully justify the text of the letter though most did ensure that all the text between the header and footer was consistently formatted. Misspellings of Caitlin, Donavon and Manager were frequently seen.

Key areas for improvement

- use of templates and text files as required
- sensible use of spelling and grammar checkers
- include the date in the appropriate location in a letter
- apply correct layout for an address
- enter appropriate greeting line
- include an appropriate subject line for a letter
- include appropriate complimentary close for a letter
- check alignment of text
- check consistency of font size and style
- checking fitness for purpose

Activity 2 – 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. Some candidates lost marks for screen prints of reports where details in the header and footer were not evidenced.

Task DB1
This was designed to be a relatively straightforward database task of entering a new record, deleting a record and then sorting the table. The candidates were then required to print out the table. Most candidates gained all the marks on this task. The large majority of candidates deleted the required record, though a few deleted most of the record but not the ID. However, there were a number of candidates who failed to copy the given data accurately into the new record. 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. Some candidates sorted the table on the wrong field.

Task DB2
Candidates were required to carry out a simple search. 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. Incorrect spelling of Saturday and failing to sort the records in order of date of birth were frequent errors. 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 more complex search on the table. They were asked to show only some of the fields in the given order. Many candidates gained full marks for this task. However there were many who included the girls in their response. A frequent error was to miss out the students who were born on April 1.

Task DB5
Candidates were asked to produce a complex search of related tables. This caused some difficulty for many candidates who were unable to search using the OR command on separate fields. Many produced an AND search. (i.e students choosing SNO on both Saturday and Sunday.) Many candidates limited their search to show only the students choosing SNO on either Saturday or Sunday. Many of these candidates were then not able to demonstrate the secondary sorting that the task required.

Task DB6
Candidates were asked to produce a database report based on the search results in DB5. They were asked to present this in landscape orientation. This was completed well by a number of candidates, though occasionally more thought could have been given to the layout so that fields were separated more clearly.

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
- simple search using the correct combination of comparison operators ($>$, $=$ and $<$)
- complex search on two or more fields using appropriate comparison operators
- use of AND / OR searches in separate fields
- 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
- amend column layout in a report to space data effectively
- avoid truncation of data / field names
- print in landscape and/or portrait

Activity 3 – Using Multimedia Software

Candidates were given a slide show presentation containing 2 and were asked to complete the show with 3 further slides. They were provided with the text and a set of images from which they were expected to select appropriately. Most candidates scored well on this task. Where errors were made, it was usually due to poor selection of text and/or images. For example, many candidates included the sub-headings from the text file even though they had already included the day in the title. Some candidates did not include the day in the slide title. Many candidates also lost marks due to lack of consistency in inserting the logo. Candidates who did this well appeared to copy and paste the logo from slide 1 or slide 2. Several candidates included images of snowboarding even though this was not mentioned in the text on the slides.

The indentation of text on slide 4 was not generally well done. It seemed that many candidates just typed in extra spaces and did not use the sub-levels of bullet points. Several candidates lost marks for including the 7.30 activity in the indenting. The impression gained is that professional layout of slides is not well developed in candidates. Many of the slides were poorly presented with poor choice of text size and image size and images often overlapping text. A large majority of candidates printed the document with 2 slides per page as requested. A small number used screenshots thus not gaining the mark for printing in handout format.

Key areas for improvement

- appropriate selection of given text and images
- entering suitable titles for slides
- indentation of text / bullet points
- printing in handout format (multiple slides per page)
- appropriate layout of text and images
- appropriate size of text and images
- consistency of layout including background colours
- proof reading and checking for fitness for purpose

Activity 4 – 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 to format the column titles to make them bold and underlined. Most candidates demonstrated the required skill in formatting the column titles. Several candidates also formatted the contents of the first column in the same way. This was not penalised.

Task SP2
In this task candidates had to insert a label, produce formulae and display the spreadsheet in formula view without truncating data or formulae. 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. Their capability to displaying formulae was often demonstrated by their responses to later tasks.

Many candidates continue to 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(B4+C4) rather than the more efficient =B4+C4. Many of these candidates then lost marks for the total of the column by using the format =D4+D5+D6 etc. This inefficient use of the SUM function was evident even in some very able students who scored very highly on the paper as a whole.

Some candidates lost marks because in using the AutoSum function they had not excluded the empty cells in D10. Examiners reported that some candidates lost marks due to inaccuracies in copying the labels. These candidates had usually used lower case or added extra text or failed to include colons present in the instructions.

Task SP3
Candidates were asked to insert a new row between rows 7 and 8. They were then asked to add a set of data in the new row and check that the formulae still gave the correct totals. The spreadsheet was asked for in data view. Some candidates who failed to show the formulae in SP2, incorrectly showed the formulae in this task. Examiners in this situation marked the candidate's SP3 work as if it were task SP2 to give the candidate the marks for suitable formulae required in task SP2.

Some candidates lost marks for incorrect location of the new row. There were frequent errors in the spelling of Maghull and Grammar. A few candidates did not check that their formulae for totals included the information added. This was usually because they had used the incorrect format for the formula for total students or because they had not placed the new data in the correct location.

Task SP4
This task required candidates to enter a constant value in a cell and use this value in a calculation making use of an absolute cell reference. This was again generally well completed by the candidates. However many lost marks for incorrect data entry. Most candidates were able to produce a formula which made use of an absolute cell

reference but lost some marks for inappropriate use of the SUM function. Candidates who failed to use an absolute cell reference also lost marks for replication. Candidates should be reminded that this examination is a test of efficient use of ICT facilities and retyping a formula several times is not an efficient way of using a constant.

Task SP5
In this task candidates were asked to calculate a conditional discount. Most candidates coped well with the criterion for the IF function but failed to calculate the 20% discount. Some candidates also lost marks for putting quotation marks around the calculations of 20% and 0. Candidates were then asked to print selected columns from the spreadsheet.

Most candidates who attempted this task scored well. Where marks were lost it was due to incorrect entry of text labels, careless errors in the formula (e.g. referring to D3 rather than D4), errors in calculating 20%, inappropriate use of SUM, truncation of data/formulae and failure to print only columns A, F & G on one sheet of A4.

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 without truncation
- 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 5 – Using Desktop Publishing / Word Processing Software

Candidates were provided with the outside pages of a 4 page A5 sized leaflet about the celebration weekend. They were asked to complete the inside pages using text and images provided in the data files.

Most candidates were able to insert a suitable image and size and locate it appropriately. Candidates generally imported all the text – though occasionally there was truncation of text at the end of the insert. Justification and text wrapping were not always completed very well. With text wrapping, single lines of text were left.

There was a general lack of consistency in the overall layout with different fonts, styles and sizes being evident. Most candidates presented the document as required as two A5 pages on one sheet.

Key areas for improvement

- correctly copy information into a document
- choose and import suitable images to a document
- text wrapping of images
- justification of text
- use consistent fonts, sizes and styles
- use consistent layouts
- page orientation
- produce printout with 2 A5 pages per sheet
- proofread and check for fitness for purpose

Statistics

Unit Results

Grade	Max Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Raw boundary mark	100	98	89	79	69	63	57	51	45
Uniform boundary mark	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20

Qualification Results

Grade	A*A*	A*A	AA	AB	BB	BC	CC	CD	DD	DE	EE	EF	FF	FG	GG
Uniform Mark Boundaries	270	255	240	225	210	195	180	165	150	135	120	105	90	75	60

Notes

Maximum marks (Raw): the marks corresponding to the sum total of the marks available.

Boundary mark: The minimum mark required by a candidate to qualify for a given grade.

Grade boundaries may vary from year to year and from subject to subject, depending on the demand of the question paper.