

Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2011

Applied GCSE

Applied GCSE

Information and Communication
Technology (5331)

Unit 1 - ICT Tools and Applications

Edexcel is one of the leading examining and awarding bodies in the UK and throughout the world. We provide a wide range of qualifications including academic, vocational, occupational and specific programmes for employers.

Through a network of UK and overseas offices, Edexcel's centres receive the support they need to help them deliver their education and training programmes to learners.

For further information, please call our GCE line on 0844 576 0025, our GCSE team on 0844 576 0027, or visit our website at www.edexcel.com.

If you have any subject specific questions about the content of this Examiners' Report that require the help of a subject specialist, you may find our Ask The Expert email service helpful.

Ask The Expert can be accessed online at the following link:

<http://www.edexcel.com/Aboutus/contact-us/>

Alternatively, you can speak directly to a subject specialist at Edexcel on our dedicated ICT telephone line: 0844 372 2186

January 2011

Publications Code UG026100

All the material in this publication is copyright

© Edexcel Ltd 2011

Principal Examiner's Report

During this session just under 1,000 candidates were entered for the examination which forms Unit 1 of this specification. There were no re-sit candidates. Responses varied considerably and covered all grades. The examination is now in its fifteenth series. However many of the issues which have been highlighted in previous series still remain. It is true that some of the issues which were mentioned in previous series are now much less commonly experienced. For example, few candidates now fail to include their details on the scripts and examiners report that the work of most centres is properly submitted by candidates.

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

For example:

- 16 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. In many cases this would mean a difference in grade awarded on the paper. Candidates are advised to check carefully (character by character) that they have copied information accurately.
- 11 marks on the paper this series 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. Marks were also lost where candidates had not checked printouts to make sure that formulae and data were not truncated.
- 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 a few 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. The instructions for collating are clearly presented on page 2 of the cover sheet. It is also the case that a small number of 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.

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 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 often reproduce standard layouts for business documents such as letters and agendas.

There were no problems associated with the data files reported to the Board.

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 and the Smarts website (www.smartsleisure.co.uk) continue 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

Centres are reminded that the candidates should only have access to the software required for the examination 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, it still remains the case that there are few centres where 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 need to be regularly 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 a few 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 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 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.

Data files and Instructions for Centres for the May 2011 series will be available for registered centres to download from the Edexcel website in late April.

DETAILED BREAKDOWN BY ACTIVITY

ACTIVITY 1 - USING DESKTOP PUBLISHING SOFTWARE

Candidates were required to produce a poster to advertise a charity fun run. The question paper included a storyboard for the poster. They were provided with text and images from which to select appropriately. Candidates were generally able to follow the layout suggested but lost marks due to poor spelling and failure to provide a poster which was fit for purpose. Many of those seen had text sizes that would have made the poster illegible from a distance of more than a few feet. Sometimes, inappropriate text was selected for inclusion in the poster - for example details of a concert taking place on a different date to the fun run.

Key areas for improvement

- use of templates and text files as required
- sensible use of spelling and grammar checkers
- appropriate selection of text and images
- apply given layout for a poster
- check alignment of text
- check appropriateness 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 of column headers in reports and field labels in forms 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 visible.

Task DB1

This was designed to be a relatively straightforward database task of entering a new record and 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. Occasionally marks were lost where candidates had not used the correct capitalisation of the text in the data entry. Some candidates sorted the table on the wrong field or did not sort in the correct order.

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 or by truncating the fields in a screenshot.

Task DB4

In task DB3 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 those who lost marks generally lost them due to using <30 rather than <=30 in the age criteria. They were asked to produce a screen shot of the design view of the query. This often was truncated so that examiners could not be certain whether further fields were present.

Task DB4

Candidates were asked to create a database report of the results of the query design they had done for task DB3. Few candidates gained a mark for having a suitable title for the report often failing to spell even relatively simple words correctly or leaving out important information. Southampton was often incorrectly spelt. An increasing number of candidates did attempt successfully to customise the field column headings.

Task DB5

Candidates were asked to produce a data entry form for new runners for the fun run. The majority of candidates gained some credit for using the wizard but often failed to customise the labels so that these made more sense. Screenshots again were often truncated and vital information was missing as a result.

Task DB6

Candidates were asked to search the related tables using a simple search. They were asked to present the results in a particular field order. Most candidates who attempted this task scored well.

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
- searches on related tables
- show and print only the required fields of a table/search/report
- provide suitable title for database report
- customise field names in a database report
- amend column layout in a report to space data effectively
- customisation of labels in a data entry form
- avoid truncation of data / field names

ACTIVITY 3 - USING WORD PROCESSING SOFTWARE

Candidates were required to produce a standard letter for a mail merge from a letterhead template and a separate text file. The recipient details were presented to candidates in a spreadsheet table. This presentation did not seem to cause the majority of candidates problems. 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 unnecessarily added the Smarts address in the top right hand corner. Many candidates failed to gain marks for locating the recipient's address on the left of the page - preferably in the top. Often the date was not present or misaligned. Most candidates did not include a subject line - though this one of the standard components of a business letter.

The mail merge fields were often included but spacing was often lacking. Candidates often included the mobile phone in the address. The greeting line again often lacked spacing between the merge fields.

Misspellings of Caitlin, Donavon and Manager were frequently seen. Also evident was the misuse of capitalisation of the "s" in "sincerely"

Candidates who attempted the merge often gained full marks for the process. Some lost marks because their submitted letter was not a merge of the standard letter or because they included more than one copy of the letter.

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
- use appropriate spacing when inserting merge fields
- check alignment of text
- check consistency of font size and style
- checking fitness for purpose and accuracy before merging
- merge directly from the standard letter

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. They were also asked to create a graph.

Task SP1

Candidates were asked to insert a row and add extra data to the table. They were then asked to carry out formatting of the spreadsheet to make it easier to use and to sort the table on one of the columns. Most candidates demonstrated the required skill in formatting the column titles. However few candidates used both borders and shading. Most candidates managed to sort the column but had not selected the whole table and therefore had details mixed up.

Task SP2

Candidates were asked to create a graph to show the sponsorship per mile for the Fun Run. Many candidates did not include a title which matched the requirements of the mark scheme. However, the rest of the graph was usually well presented.

Task SP3

Candidates were asked to do two relatively simple calculations using the spreadsheet. Most candidates at some centres continue to use SUM inappropriately. It is expected that efficient formulae are used in a spreadsheet. Often the candidates would display a formula such as =SUM(D4*E4) and then use =F4+F5+F6+F7+ ... to calculate the total for the column. The candidates were then required to print just columns A, B and F on one sheet of A4. This was well done in the majority of cases.

Task SP4

In this task candidates were asked to calculate a conditional bonus. Most candidates coped well with the criterion for the IF function but failed to calculate the 35% bonus. Some candidates also lost marks for putting quotation marks around the calculations of 35% and 0.

Most candidates who attempted this task scored well. There were a few candidates who gained the correct values but did not display the formulae so little credit could be awarded.

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
- 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
- produce a variety of charts from a spreadsheet.

ACTIVITY 5 - USING MULTIMEDIA / PRESENTATION SOFTWARE

Candidates were asked to produce a presentation of four slides for use at a formal meeting. They were given the text content for the first two slides and titles for all the slides. They were asked to insert the graph and the results of one of the database queries. They were asked to make appropriate comments about the two extracts.

Most of the candidates managed the mechanical parts of the task - inserting the titles, logo and the images. Several candidates included screen shots of the query design rather than the results. Another common error was the insertion of a screen shot of the database results rather than copying the table.

Comments about the inserts were often poorly written and did not always explain what the item was. Candidates also often lost marks for not checking the slides were consistent. Candidates were required to print handout versions of the slides. This was completed much better than in previous series and there were few candidates producing screen shot of the slides. Weaker candidates still tended to produce each slide on a separate sheet.

Key areas for improvement

- appropriate selection of given text and images
- entering given titles for slides
- consistent use of text / bullet points
- printing in handout format (multiple slides per page)
- appropriate layout of text and images
- appropriate size of text and images
- insertion of graphics, database query results etc
- consistency of layout including background colours
- proof reading and checking for fitness for purpose.

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:
<http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>

Further copies of this publication are available from
Edexcel Publications, Adamsway, Mansfield, Notts, NG18 4FN

Telephone 01623 467467
Fax 01623 450481

Email publications@linneydirect.com

January 2011

Publications Code UG026100

For more information on Edexcel qualifications, please visit www.edexcel.com/quals

Edexcel Limited. Registered in England and Wales no.4496750
Registered Office: One90 High Holborn, London, WC1V 7BH