

Principal Examiner Feedback

June 2011

GCSE Applied ICT
5331 - ICT Tools and Applications

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Principal Examiner's Report for Unit 5331 – ICT Tools and Applications

During this session just over 1,000 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 sixteenth series. There will be a re-sit paper available in January 2012 if required. Many of the issues which have been highlighted in previous series still remain. It is true that some of these 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 collated by candidates.

The main issue to note is that candidates lose a large number of marks because of the failure to pay attention to detail, 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 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.
- 9 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 the formulae and data were not truncated.
- Several candidates lost marks where screenshot evidence was required. 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 the data and pasting it into a word processing 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.

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, are area where candidates 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, agendas and memos are seldom suitable or professionally laid out.

Software

The use of Microsoft products dominates the work seen by examiners. 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 Microsoft 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 a few cases of candidates failing 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 for printing are available on the Edexcel website and within the Instructions for Conduct of the Examination (ICE) document. In addition, the paper generally includes the instruction "**You MUST enter your name, candidate number, centre number and task name BEFORE PRINTING**" within each task.

Data Files and Software

Some centres seemed not to be aware that the Notes for Centres **must** be read when the files have been downloaded. These notes 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 Notes for Centres for the January 2012 series will be available for registered centres to download from the Edexcel website in December 2011.

DETAILED BREAKDOWN BY ACTIVITY

The theme of the examination paper for this series was the retirement of the owner of Smarts Leisure Park bringing to a suitable conclusion the papers for this specification.

ACTIVITY 1 – USING MULTIMEDIA SOFTWARE

Candidates were given the first slide of an on-screen presentation to advertise the retirement party. They were also provided with a story board in the question paper. They were asked to produce the remaining two slides using the data files and the storyboard. Most candidates scored well on this activity. The most frequent errors were failure to copy the text accurately from the data files and a failure to ensure that the logo image was of similar size and position to the one on the given slide. Weaker candidates did not follow the storyboard and failed to format the text in a similar way to slide 1.

Key areas for improvement

- Use of a storyboard to determine layout
- Copying text and images from data files
- Use of consistent font styles and sizes in a presentation
- Use of a consistent size of logo on a professional document

ACTIVITY 2 – USING SPREADSHEET SOFTWARE

Candidates were supplied with a spreadsheet consisting of two worksheets. They were asked to format the first sheet and delete one of the rows of data. They were then asked to produce a chart to display the data. The final task in this activity was to use the second worksheet to calculate the tickets for the party.

Task SP1

Candidates generally scored well in entering the data and formatting the cells for currency. However, they were less successful in formatting borders and shading, often including inappropriate columns in their formatting. Candidates generally did not truncate the data. Examiners reported that candidates often failed to remove gridlines and failed to show the row and column headers.

Task SP2

Most candidates displayed the correct chart type but often lost marks for including the total row in the chart. Examiners reported that most candidates also had the correct legend and were able to display the/ percentages. However, examiners report that many candidates do not check their printout carefully enough and produce a document where the segments of the chart are difficult to distinguish.

Task SP3

Candidates were asked to enter a title into the worksheet add up the values in each row. They were then asked to produce a formula with a conditional response which included an absolute cell reference. Finally they were asked to calculate the amount remaining to be paid using an absolute cell reference. They were asked to replicate their formulae and print out selected columns of the spreadsheet. Most candidates seemed to be able to complete these tasks well and those that produced a formula view generally scored well.

Key areas for improvement

- be aware of the need for consistency of capitalisation in labels and headings
- change page orientation from landscape to portrait or portrait to landscape
- change row heights and column widths to display labels and data effectively
- correctly copy and enter headings and labels
- correctly enter functions and formulae
- create an IF function including correct criterion and messages
- create efficient formulae (especially the appropriate use of the SUM function)
- delete rows and/or columns
- ensure all necessary columns (and data) are printed on one page without truncation
- enter given data into correct cells
- format labels consistently using capitalisation, bold and font size appropriately
- print in formula view and data view
- print selected cell ranges on one page
- produce a variety of charts from a spreadsheet
- show and/or hide gridlines and row and column headers
- use of absolute and relative cell referencing in formulae.

ACTIVITY 3 – USING WORD PROCESSING SOFTWARE

Candidates were required to produce a memo to be sent to a colleague about a retirement planning meeting and an agenda for the meeting. These tasks have appeared regularly in previous series. However candidates often seem unaware of the standard layout and often miss out on important details.

Task WP1

Candidates were asked to prepare a memo for Caitlin Donavon to send to Anders Johansson to invite him to a meeting. The failure to check carefully was most evident in this task where the names of Caitlin and Anders were frequently misspelt. Examiners also reported that candidates also failed to provide a suitable message or subject for the memo. The paper usually gives quite clear guidance about what the memo is about.

Task WP2

Candidates were provided with a list of four items to be included into a standard agenda. Whilst most candidates used these four items, examiners reported that many candidates did not include the standard items or put them in the wrong order. Quite a number of candidates failed to include the details of when and where the meeting was due to take place.

Key areas for improvement

- customising the use of templates and text files as required
- sensible use of spelling and grammar checkers
- including the date in the appropriate location in a memo header
- standard layouts for business documents such as a memo and an agenda
- resizing images without distortion
- care in copying names and details from the question paper
- using numbering of items/paragraphs consistently.

ACTIVITY 3 – USING DATABASE SOFTWARE

There continues to be an improvement in the candidates' responses to database tasks. The number of candidates losing marks due to failure to include candidate details before they print, 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

Candidates were required to sort a table of data, copy the table into a word processor document and identify the duplicate records. Most candidates gained all the marks on this task. However, there were a number of candidates who failed to sort data accurately and/or failed to identify the correct duplicate records.

Task DB2

Candidates were then asked to delete the duplicates and enter a new record into the database. Candidates continue to make careless errors in transcribing text from the question paper and lose marks unnecessarily. Most candidates deleted the correct records and re-sorted the table as required.

Task DB4

In task DB3 candidates were asked to complete a simple search using a single criterion. They were asked to show only some of the fields. Many

candidates gained full marks for this task. However those who lost marks generally lost them due to including the incorrect fields.

Task DB4

Candidates were asked to complete a more complex search using multiple criteria. They were asked to sort the records obtained using a single sort field and then print selected fields. Most candidates gained some marks though few gained all the marks. Where the candidates lost marks it was often due to including incorrect fields in the print and using an incomplete criterion on the Hours field (< rather than <=).

Task DB5

In DB5, the candidates were asked to produce a report of the results of the search carried out in DB4. They were asked to show only selected fields. For a report, candidates are expected to supply an appropriate title, customise field headings such as FirstName and use appropriate spacing for the columns of data. Many candidates fail to use the information in the question to provide a suitable title and do not customise the template so that field headings are not appropriate.

Task DB6

In this final task candidates were asked to create a search of the two related tables and display selected fields and carry out a search on more than one field. Many candidates gained marks for obtaining the correct records and displaying the correct fields but did not carry out both the primary and secondary sorts.

Key areas for improvement

- correctly adding new records using data as given
- identifying duplicate records
- deleting records
- sorting tables of data in ascending and descending order using single and multiple fields
- showing and printing selected 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
- showing and printing only the required fields of a table/search/report
- providing suitable title for database report
- customising field names in a database report
- amending column layout in a report to space data effectively
- avoiding truncation of data / field names in printout.

ACTIVITY 5 – USING DESKTOP PUBLISHING/WORD PROCESSING SOFTWARE

Candidates were given a set of report layout instructions and were required to produce a report using the data files and insertions from the documents they had produced during the examination. They were asked to fully justify the text. This is rarely completed by the candidates and suggests that they are not familiar with the term “fully justify”. Subheadings and headings/titles are rarely formatted consistently and appropriately. Most candidates were able to insert the appropriate items from the other activities – but often lost marks for inappropriate locations or not adjusting them for the requirements of the report – for example, not including just selected fields in the database search results. Many candidates used screen shots even though the question paper had indicated that they should not do so. Many candidates failed to gain the marks for fitness for purpose because they did not fit the whole document on one page.

Key areas for improvement

- appropriate selection of given text
- justification of text
- word wrapping round images/inserts
- integrating information from spreadsheets, databases and presentations into a word processed document
- consistent formatting of body text, subheading and headings
- proof reading and checking for fitness for purpose.

Edexcel is appreciative of the support that it has received from centres who have continued with the Applied GCSE ICT course and hopes that it will continue to be able to work together with Centres in its replacement specifications.

Grade Boundaries

Centres are reminded that Applied GCSE ICT is an awarded qualification. As such, grade boundaries are subject to review each series for both written paper and coursework units.

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>

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